

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Crafty
Rogues

by
Boice De Bois

World of the Old Bowery

10¢ PER
COPY

NOVEMBER 4

BY THE \$4.00
YEAR

Buy Nothing Send Nothing

Send No Money Pay No C.O.D.

Read every word of this amazing new offer—wear this Genuine Diamond Ring for a full week at our expense —deposit nothing—absolutely no risk or expense to you.

Mail free trial coupon below—do not enclose a penny. We will send you **on approval**, at our expense, all charges prepaid, your choice of these handsome genuine diamond rings. Pay nothing when the ring arrives—**make no deposit of any kind**. Wear the ring a week; show it to your friends; see if you can duplicate it for fifty dollars in the stores. Then, after a week, decide. If you wish to return the ring, do so at our expense and that settles everything. The trial is entirely free. **You pay nothing, so you can lose nothing.** But if you decide to keep the ring, just mail us \$3.75 a month until you have paid the amazingly low price of \$38.75. A year to pay—no interest.

Genuine Diamonds

The Ladies' Ring (upper illustration) is an elaborate pierced model executed in 14-K solid green gold, with an 18-K hand engraved and beaded white gold top. A striking new model. It is set with a large brilliant, blue-white, top quality, perfectly cut, genuine diamond—a remarkably big value, worth at least \$50.00 anywhere. Our price is only \$38.75, with a year to pay (\$3.75 a month).

The Men's Ring (lower illustration) is some new fluted design, extra massive 14-K solid gold, with an 18-K hand engraved and beaded white gold top. Set with a large brilliant, blue-white, top quality, perfectly cut, genuine diamond. Try to duplicate this ring for fifty dollars. Our price is only \$38.75, payable \$3.75 a month, a year to pay.

Mail this Coupon Now—
Enclose Ring Size
Send No Money
Pay No C.O.D.

Mail this Coupon

Harold Lachman Co. 204 S. Peoria Street Dept. 2278 Chicago
Send me absolutely free and **EXPEDITE**, for a week at our expense, the GENUINE DIAMOND RING, shown below. I will close no money. I am to pay nothing when it arrives. At the end of one week, will either return the ring or else send you \$3.75 first payment and \$3.75 each month, until you have fully paid off \$38.75. This remains with you until fully paid off. ENCLOSE MY TRIAL RING.
 Ladies' Ring No. A4350 Men's Ring No. A4450

Name _____
Address _____
Age _____ Occupation _____

Worth \$50 Price \$38⁷⁵
Cut to **Genuine Diamonds**
Mail the Coupon for Free Trial

Radio Course FREE! My new \$45.00 Radio Course given free
when you enroll for the Electrical Course. Mail Co.



Electrical Expert

Men like you are needed right now to fill big-paying jobs in the electrical field. There never was a time when opportunities for money-making were as good as they are now. Good jobs are open everywhere to men who know "what's what." Electrical Experts earn from \$12 to \$30 a day. Even the ordinary electricians get top-notch pay. Why don't you get in on this and get a real man's job now? With my simplified Electrical Course I can quickly fit you to hold one. Read W. E. Pence's letter below. This is only one of thousands of such letters I have received.

You Can Be a Big Money Maker

I have trained over 20,000 men in electricity—thousands of successful men all over the world attribute their success to my training. I can make you successful too. In fact I will guarantee your success. If you will follow my home study course you can become an expert, drawing a fat salary, in the same time it takes you to get a little raise in the work you are doing now.

Jumps \$125
From A Month to
\$750 and Over
READ
the Story of
W. E. Pence



W. E. Pence
in his working tools

McConahay

Mr. Cooper.— Oct. 5, 1921
When I enrolled with you less than a year ago I was a common mechanic earning \$25 to \$30 a week. Today I am an "Electrical Expert" with a business of my own that gives me a clear profit of over \$750 a month.

I have more work than I can do. The people around Chehalis come to me to fix their starters, generators and ignition troubles because they know that I know how to do it right.

My success, I owe to you, Mr. Cooke. The thorough practical training which you gave me through your Easily-learned Home Study Course in Electricity has made me an independent, highly respected business man in this community.

Chehalis, Wash.
Oct 9 1921

OK 9-1921

less than a year.

WIC 萬國機器 523

Outfit Free
Every man who enrolls for my electrical course gets a big outfit of tools, material and instruments free. This includes an electric motor and other things not usually found in a beginner's outfit. These are the same tools and the same material you will use later in your work. Everything practical and good right from the start.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer
CHICAGO ENGINEERING
WORKS, Dept. 5178
2150 Lawrence, Chicago

Act Right Now
Let me send you my big free book
telling details of the opportunities
electricity offers you and a sam-
ple lesson also free. Mail the
coupon and get this at once.

Dear Sir: Send at once Sample Lessons, your Big Book, and full particulars of your Free Dentist and Home Study Course—all fully prepaid without obligation on my part.

Name.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

Vol. CXLVI

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NUMBER 6

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ABOVE SUSPICION

By ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD

Death, richly deserved, hovered for years over the head of Joseph Benkard, who made friends only to betray them, but when it came it came like a bolt from above.
THIS SIX-PART SERIAL BEGINS NEXT WEEK.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHEBRINGTON, Secretary

CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, COPYRIGHT, 1922

Entered as second class matter July 11, 1900, at the Post-Office at New York, under Act of March 3, 1879.



"We pay him \$100 a week"

AND he's worth every cent of it. Came here several years ago asking for a job. He got just that—a small job at a small salary.

"Then I forgot about him—hardly knew he was on the payroll until one day I got a letter from the International Correspondence Schools telling me that Thomas A. Andrews had enrolled for a course and had received a mark of 98 for his first lesson.

"There's a man worth watching," I said to myself, so I began to keep tabs on his work. Pretty soon he began coming to me with suggestions. I could almost see him growing.

"Somehow, he was the first man I thought of whenever there was a position open. And he always made good because he was always preparing himself for the job ahead. We pay him \$100 a week now and he's going to be earning even a larger salary some day. I wish we had more men like him."

HOW do you stand when your employer checks up his men for promotion? Does he think of you? Is there really any reason why you should be selected?

Ask yourself these questions fairly. You must face them if you expect advancement and more money. For now, more than ever, the big jobs are going to men with special training.

There is an easy, fascinating way for you to get this special training right at home in spare time. One hour a day, spent with the I. C. S. in the quiet of your own home, will bring you more money, more comforts, more pleasure, all that success means.

Don't let another priceless hour of spare time go to waste! Without cost or obligation, let us prove that we can help you. Mark and mail this coupon now.

— — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — —
INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2163-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING DEPARTMENT

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Better Letters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Trade |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Banking and Banking Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas and Oil (including C.P.A.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nicholson Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Wireless Mail Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Common School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private Secretary | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning |

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Architect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Print Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice | <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Builder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Positions | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engine Operating | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing and Heating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Body Repair | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Metallurgy | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture and Poultry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics |

Name _____

Street _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Occupation _____

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

CLEAN UP \$100.00 WEEKLY FROM NOW TILL CHRISTMAS WITH "NIFTY NINE". Weeks average 100 x a dealer profit each. 20-40 sales daily frequent made. Demonstrating outfit enclosed under \$20 other costs all. All ideal for Christmas gifts—several at each house. Big rush now starting. Get free Sample outfit offer. Send brings our outline plans. DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 28, Chicago.

AGENTS—MAKE \$7 TO \$14 A DAY. BRAND NEW ALUMINUM HANDLE CUTLERY SET. You take orders, no delivery and collect. Pay day. Full or part time. No experience necessary. No capital. We need agents. Agents must be women to cover every country in the U.S. Demand enormous. Write quick. JENNINGS MFG. CO., Dept. 1899, Dayton, Ohio.

\$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular \$25.00 value. We are offering this bargain offer to prove our wonderful values in tailoring. Write for our big sample book showing how agents make \$35.00 to \$40.00 weekly just by taking orders for high grade tailoring. WASHINGTON TAUTOLING CO., Dept. L-304, Chicago.

Clarks made \$18 an hour selling vest-pocket windshield cleaner needed by every automobile, motorman, engineer, etc. rub keeps glass clear 24 hours—\$2.00 per bottle. Amazing proportions free. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 633, Toledo, Ohio.

Portraits, photo pillow tops, frames, sheet pictures, medallions, merchant's signs, watermarks and too many alike and more. Business enormous, starting from 30 days credit. JAS. C. BAILEY CO., Dept. K-11, Chicago.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Line is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ho Co. 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

NO DULL TIMES SELLING FOOD—PEOPLE MUST EAT. FEDERAL DISTRIBUTORS MAKE BIG MONEY; \$33,000 yearly and up. No capital or experience needed; guaranteed sales, unsold goods may be returned. FREE SAMPLES to customers. Repeat orders sure. Exclusive territory. Ask Now! FEDERAL PURE FOOD CO., Dept. 33, Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 34, East Orange, N. J.

We pay \$8 a day taking orders for INSYO TYRES. Guaranteed to prevent punctures and blowouts. Double tire mileage. Any tire. Tremendous demand. Low price. Write quick for Agency. American Accessory Co., B-291, Clinton, Ohio.

27,000 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE; low, different; cannot injure records; \$10.00 daily easy. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Dept. 1112, Metcalf Bldg., Chicago.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN. Make Sparkling Glass Name Plates, Numbers, Checkboards, Medallions, Signs. Big Illustrated book free. E. PALMER, 500 Wooster, Ohio.

\$5 to \$15 Daily Easy—Introducing New Style Sparkling Glass Name Plates. Must wear or replace plates. No capital or experience required. Just show sample, write orders. Your pay in advance. We deliver and collect. Biggest outfit furnished all colors and grades including silks—wool and leathers. MAC-O-CHEE MILLS CO., Dept. 2444, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Men & Women—or Managers of Good Live Crews—clean up big money before the last day selling our Super-Bag. Seats on sight. Big profits. Write to-day for terms. PRESTO BAG CO., Dept. A, 81 S. Howard St., Akron, Ohio.

AGENTS—ONE AN HOUR TO ADVERTISE AND DISTRIBUTE SAMPLES TO CONSUMER. AMERICAN PRODUCTS COMPANY, 1781 AMERICAN BUILDING, CINCINNATI, OHIO.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

Land Seekers! Attention: \$10 to \$50 starts you on 20 to 40 or 50 acres near hustling city in lower Mich. Has long time. Write today for FREE booklet giving full information. Swigart Land Co., P.O. Box 245 First National Bank Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR \$5—Photoplay Ideas accepted any form: revised, tried, published, copyrighted. Bold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 40 COMPANIES: \$10 TO \$300 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence sought or returned. Details sent free to beginners. Send your ideas. PROGRESSIVE LEADERS, 235 Wmwright, St. Louis, Mo.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. One of our Staff writers writes big song-hits. Submit your ideas to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 100 Madison Building, New York.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING AGENTS. OUR VIRGIN WOOL TAILED TO ORDER SUITS AND OVERCOATS SELL FAST AT \$29.50. All fabrics and styles the same price. Over 600 men now making \$20 to \$150 a week. You get paid in advance stock never. Protected territory. Get a switch outfit. Write Salesmanager, J. B. SIMPSON, Dept. 304, 831-84 West Adams, Chicago.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearers. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 803 Broadway, New York.

Men's Shirts. Easy to Sell. Big demand everywhere. Make \$15.00 daily. Universal stores. Complete line. Exclusive patterns. Free Samples. CHICAGO SHIRT COMPANY, 5 So. Clinton, Factory, 236, Chicago.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPERS' COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of three parts. Has two different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. 66, Fairfield, Iowa.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, soaps, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacaressin Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

NW OIL LAMP BURNS 94%. AIR-B. T. JOHNSON, 940 ALADDIN BUILDING, 609 W. LAKE, CHICAGO, ILL. Inventor of wonderful new oil lamp that burns 94% air and beats gas or electricity. Is offering to give one free to the first user in each locality who will help introduce it. Write him for particulars.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendits, a patient patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Barnum package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 246-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

AGENTS \$25.00 A WEEK FOR SPARE TIME. Suite #1345, 1345 1/2 W. Monroe back guarantee. Guaranteed quality. Lives well known. Samples free. Write CHICAGO TAILORS ASSOCIATION, Dept. 107, Chicago.

Sell the latest nationally approved cooking utensil, the Square BROILLET. Bells on right. Convenient to carry and show. \$30 prof weekly easy for live agents. Get full details from A. H. Squire Mfg. Corp., 250 Madison Ave., New York.

SALES AGENTS WANTED in every county to give all spare time. Positions worth \$750 to \$1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.

AGENTS—SIS A DAY-EASY, QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG WEEKLY BONUS—\$15.00 premium free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful piece. Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. NEW ERA MFG. CO., 803 Madison St., Dept. 20-G, Chicago.

AGENTS: Get your money on the spot. \$15.00 daily demonstrating. Sessions. No waiting for commission or salary checks. No delivering. No collecting. Big income just starting. Write or wire PERLEY LUDLOW CO., 8-1910, Dayton, Ohio.

ACT QUICK: \$100 WEEKLY. Sells like wildfire. Clean-Rite. Now Washing Compound. No rubbing. Women crazy about it. 300% Profit. Premium Plan Gets Business. Samples FREE. Bestever Products Co., 1941-A Irving Park, Chicago.

AGENTS: New Reversible Raincoat—Not sold in stores. Two coats in one. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. You take orders. We pay you daily. No experience necessary. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., Court 1106, Dayton, Ohio.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money saving hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC. ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit MSS. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hanover, Mo.

BIG MONEY IN WRITING PHOTPLAYS, STORIES, POEMS, SONGS. Send today for FREE copy WHITER'S RUMLETIN, full of helpful advice how to write, where to sell. EDWARD'S PUBLISHER, 601 Butler Building, Cincinnati.

AUTOMOBILES

AUTOMOBILE MECHANICS. Owners. Garage men. Repairmen, send for free copy America's Popular Motor Magazine. Contains helpful instructive information on overhauling, ignition, wiring, carburetors, batteries, etc. AUTOMOBILE DIGEST, 500 Butler Building, Cincinnati.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunities. 7000 successful graduates. Write at once for our free catalogues. CLEVELAND AUTO SCHOOL, 1819 E. 26th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

Classified Advertising continued on page 5.

Win \$1,000



How Many Objects in This Picture Begin With "B," Like "Boy," "Barrel," Etc?

How's Your Eyesight?

HERE'S a puzzle game that can bring you plenty of spare-time fun and \$1,000 besides. Have the family or friends play with you—see who can find the most objects in the picture beginning with "B," like "boy," "barrel," etc. Send in your list of "B"-words as soon as possible—YOU MAY WIN ONE OF THE \$1,000 PRIZES.

Winning \$1,000 Easy!

50 in All—Try Your Luck!

Three \$1,000 prizes have been hung up with other cash prizes—50 IN ALL. If your list of "B"-words is awarded first, second, or third and you have "qualified" under Class "A," by sending a \$5 Huber Pencil order during this advertising campaign, you will win \$1,000; if you send in under Class "B," a \$3 pencil order you would win \$500; if no pencil is ordered you would win \$25. You may be the "lucky" person who will win \$1,000. You never know how "lucky" you are until you have tried.

Others Have Won—You Can Win

If others, even school children as young as 12 and 14 years have won \$1,000, you can win. The following persons each won \$1,000 in previous advertising campaigns conducted by this company: Thomas Damico, 1154 S. 12th St., Philadelphia, Pa.; Frank Verner, 1000 1/2 1st St., Tacoma, Wash.; E. J. Kelleter, Kenosha, Wis.; Mrs. Buffin, Milwaukee, Wis.; Mrs. Ella Phillips, Clinton, Col.; Walter Hirz, Tenshika, Mich.; Mrs. R. O. Steele, Kimball, Neb.; M. Gould, Blackfoot, Idaho, and others.

You'll Never Win Unless You Try! Act!

READ THESE RULES

1. Anyone living outside of Minnesota may compete for the free prizes except employees of the company and their relatives of the Huber Company.

2. Whoever sends in the largest number of words which correctly name the objects in the picture above will win, and \$500 will be awarded first prize, \$25 on down the line of 50 free prizes. Each word will be given for each correct word, and one point deducted for each incorrect word or omission of a correct word.

ADDRESS YOUR
SOLUTION TO

The Huber Co. DESK Minneapolis, Minn.

Three \$1,000 CASH PRIZES

Prizes	Class "A"	Class "B"	Class "C"
1st	\$1,000.00	\$300.00	\$25.00
2nd	1,000.00	300.00	25.00
3rd	1,000.00	300.00	25.00
4th	300.00	100.00	10.00
5th	100.00	25.00	5.00
6th to 10th	40.00	10.00	4.00
11th to 15th	10.00	7.50	3.00
16th to 20th	7.50	5.00	2.00
21st to 50th	5.00	3.00	1.00

Class "A"—Prize if you order \$5 pencil

Class "B"—Prize if you order \$3 pencil

Class "C"—Prize if you buy no pencil

Prizes at Republic Bank, Minneapolis

Advertising for Pencil

We want every one to become acquainted with our pencils, the most useful of all writing appliances. They make suitable gifts for every occasion.

LADY'S AND GENT'S STYLE

The illustrations show our Lady's writing Silver style (regular \$3.50, now \$3 or two for \$5, Lady's or Gentle). The \$5 gold (Lady's or Gentle) comes in Colonial Hexagon style. The Huber has many distinctive features, depending lead device, safety clamp, case, engraved barrel, non-cloggling mechanism, etc.

In case of tie for any prize offered, the judge will decide which one will be awarded to each class and the list winning the first prize will be published in the class of the contest. Enclosed list of entries will be returned on request.

4. Your solution must not include hyphenated words, compound words made up of two common English words or foreign words. Webster's International Dictionary will be used as authority.

5. It is permissible to name either singular or plural, but both cannot be used. Synonyms and words of same spelling but different meaning will not be accepted, but any part of an object can be named.

6. Contest closes Dec. 31, 1922. All entries must be postmarked by Dec. 31, 1922, and accepted. Contests in "Gentle" under Class A & B up to midnight, Dec. 31, 1922.

7. Write words on one side of paper only numbering each 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.

8. Three prominent people of Minneapolis will act as judges. Their decision will be accepted as final and conclusive.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.



Used by three generations —still 100% gun

The sturdy Stevens shotgun made its first "kills" in the hands of our grandfathers. With it our fathers first experienced the joys of hunting.

And today young men treasure it, not only for its past, but because right today, the good old Stevens still maintains its unbroken record for hard and straight shooting.

You can buy a more expensive gun than a Stevens; but you cannot buy better shooting qualities. Shotgun or rifle—a Stevens firearm is accurate.

When a Stevens barrel is bored or drilled, the final reaming cuts away less than one-half of a thousandth of an inch.

For rifling, Stevens uses a special process, slow scraping system removing less than the thirtieth part of a thousandth of an inch with each pass of the rifling cutter. A slow method—but when finished a Stevens barrel is accurate.

And a Stevens will continue to shoot straight. Stevens guns are fitted so they can't shoot loose.

When you buy a Stevens you are buying unexcelled shooting qualities and you are paying a reasonable price.

Stevens manufactures a complete line of small bore rifles and shotguns of every description. Ask at your dealer's or write for the interesting catalog describing in detail our complete line. Address:

J. STEVENS ARMS COMPANY
Dept. C-127 Chicopee Falls, Mass.
Owned and operated by the Savage
Arms Corporation. Executive and
Export Offices: 50 Church St., N.Y.

Stevens

Model 520 Stevens
repeating shotgun—
Stevens made the
first hammerless re-
peating. Price, inc.
tax, \$43.50

HELP WANTED

WRITE NEWS ITEMS and Short Stories for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plane free. PRESS-REPORTING SYNDICATE, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examination weekly. Pay rate at home. Write for free list and plan & cost, payment after securing position. CSEB 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

BE A DETECTIVE—Earn \$100, weekly; easy work; experience unnecessary; opportunities everywhere, open to all. Write today for free particulars. Write Captain Wagner, 106 East 33rd Street, New York City.

MAKES FROM 2 TO 5 DOLLARS A DAY painting Parchment Shades, without leaving the privacy of your own home. Easy to learn. We teach you to do our work and positively guarantee to sell you with interesting spare time employment. Write immediate for information. United Shade Co., Dept. F, Burgess Bldg., Toronto, Canada.

SELL UP YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic & Unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you with Wilson Methods, Ltd., Dept. G, 64 East Richmond, Toronto, Canada.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY: good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 136 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

All men, women, boys, girls, 17 to 60, willing to accept Government Positions, \$117-\$190, traveling or stationary. Write Mr. Orman, 198, St. Louis, immediately.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, Train Porters (colored), \$140-\$200. Experience unnecessary. 838 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ill.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! \$110 to \$350 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunity. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-39. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

INVENTIONS WANTED ON CASH OR ROYALTY BASIS. Patented or unpatented. We have been in business 24 years. References: Adam Fisher Mfg. Company, 148, St. Louis, Mo.

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Crafty Rogues.

By BOICE DU BOIS

CHAPTER I.

"THE CRACKER POT."

ACCORDING to the ethics of literary construction, the first chapter provides a convenient vestibule wherein the characters assemble for their formal bow to the reader—hence the scrolling of said "First chapter," within the sordid confines of Chink-nail Connors's Cracker Pot Café, and that irrespective of the fact that the fate of a kingdom was involved.

First of all we must turn the dial of time back some thirty odd years, for the Cracker Pot has gone the way of many another Cherry Hill resort that drew patronage from

Water Street society; institutions that have folded their tents and stolen away, because they no longer dared lay down the gage of battle with the McAuley Mission.

The name "Cracker Pot" rested on no ephemeral *nom de plume*, but was founded upon the substantial, though questionable hospitality of a barrel of crackers that always stood in the center of Connors's barroom floor. Of course this was a bit cheap, compared with a certain more affluent establishment nearer the Bowery, where a thousand silver dollars were screwed to the barroom floor, but it was far more acceptable to the Cracker Pot patrons.

"Bust open another barrel of crackers,"

was Connors's oft-repeated command to one of his *aid de camps*. " You got to make 'em thoisty as a camphor ball before they'll irrigate."

Standing in the small barroom, with its low ceiling yellow with the fumes of violent nicotine, one could hear the throbbing life of the Brooklyn Bridge, high overhead, where the cable wheels of that day sang an incessant metallic drone.

The deep-throated whistles of the Sound steamers might just as well have popped their signals in Connors's back room, so close was the Cracker Pot to the East River, and the gossiping bells of the old-time horse cars were always jangling not more than a block away. A section of New York where the odor of tar and tobacco hung over each alley, street and slip.

Connors had acquired the *sobriquet* of Chink-nail by assiduously nursing the growth of the nail which decorated the little finger of his right hand. It was a full half inch beyond the hygienic danger zone which prevails in polite society, but quite orthodox, according to Chinese standards—hence Chink-nail.

Had you asked any of the frequenters of the Cracker Pot: " Do you know where Connors came from?" they would have answered: " Sure—the Bowery." But the gentleman himself, in what you might term his loquacious moods, would hint of a pre-Bowery career; one which had culminated in pugilistic honors; all of which the most skeptical might have believed, after witnessing Connors's *modus operandi* when ejecting an undesirable.

" The gent is going to say ' Good night,' " Connors would announce, and if by reason of stupidity the " gent " failed to accelerate his departure, Connors would invite his Cracker Pot audience to witness the ease with which he would speed the parting guest. " I'm going to put him out with four fingers," he would observe, meaning that he would use his right hand without disturbing the polished beauty of the chink nail.

Just behind the barroom there was a " Ladies' Parlor " to which any stickling patroness might have access through a hallway, the street door of which was uncomprisingly labeled: " Ladies' Parlor."

In turn, behind the ladies' parlor, there was a roomy hall, the like of which—providing the modern cabaret acknowledges any embryonic prototype—must have served as the parent stem, and as our story opens, the raucous piano within this hall is vibrating under the hammer touch of Mr. Eddie Carbon, a most versatile ivory specialist, whose color harmonized with the name he bore.

Out in the barroom Emile, who flatly insisted upon being called " The Manager," had assumed the professional " at rest " pose, which only a certain type of New York bartender can negotiate; a bit of elegant slouchiness, and the haughty countenance that goes with it. He was waiting for the return of Connors, who usually dined in Chinatown on Saturday night.

Facing Emile across the bar was one of the habitués of the place; a human atom who still bore some trace of his former dignity and intelligence, but who was fast sliding into the catalogue of derelicts. Even now he was known to the Cracker Pot patrons as " Joie the Jug."

" It's this way, Joie," said Emile. " We are dealing with crooks and I don't know which way to play the game. Connors has got the goods, but Captain Jake knows their value—so there you are."

Joie was about to reply, but Emile interrupted him.

" Easy there—easy—here comes Connors now."

With toothpick perked at a jaunty angle from the corner of his mouth, Connors paused at the corner of the Cracker Pot bar.

" Everything going all right, Emile?" he asked.

" Cer'nly," replied the white-aproned manager.

" Any word from Captain Jake?"

" No."

" That's bad."

The smug satisfaction of animal comfort, occasioned by a full meal, gave way to a scowl that crimped the lines radiating from Connors's eyes, while his beauty nail beat a speculative tattoo against the erstwhile polished bar.

" No telegram or nothin'?" he asked.

"No—just nothing."

"It's all wrong, Emile—I got to do somethin'. Here I am trying to run a nice, respectable business, and along comes Jake and loads me up with trouble."

Emile made no reply.

"It's all wrong," Connors continued.

Emile shot a long, bony finger to within an inch of Connors's nose; it was as square as a piece of hemlock joist.

"It serves you right for moshing around with one of your relatives," he announced.

"Hold on there, Emile. He ain't no honest-to-goodness relation of mine. Jake slid into the family album on a wedding. He's just the smell that sticks around wit' th' onion—that's all."

"All right—sooner or later Jake will eat the onion."

Here Emile paused and glared at Connors as if such profound logic could not possibly fail to make an impression. Then he leaned forward.

"Know what?" he finally asked.

"I'm listening," was Connors's laconic reply.

"Four sailors who said they came to New York on Captain Jake's schooner were in here to-night looking for you."

The news was evidently disquieting to Connors. The truth was he regretted the opportunity which had been given to Emile to talk to with these men.

"What did they want?" he finally asked.

"Said they intended to get their share of big money, as promised by Jake, or hold you responsible."

"Me!" exclaimed Connors.

"Yes—you. They say that"—here his voice sank to a low, vibrating treble—"a certain foreign gov'mt would give a million dollars to know what Jake brought into this port."

"Emile," said Connors with a splendid show of disinterestedness, "you ought to get a job telling fairy stories in some kindergarten."

"It would be soft compared with handing facts to some people I know of. For instance, here is a nice, fat, little fact for you. Those sailors know that Jake hid his questionable cargo right here in the Cracker Pot, and they say that you are his partner

in the meanest conspiracy that ever got into history."

Connors's flabby cheeks lost their pinkish glow. The versatile barman had hit hard. It was bad enough to discover that Captain Jake's buccaneer crew knew something of the possible value of the daring venture, but far more disquieting to learn that Emile also knew. He did not trust Emile, and now came the question—how much information did he really possess, and to what extent was he twisting it for his own personal ends? He also wondered what Emile knew concerning Captain Jake's recent movements.

However, he was not to be tortured for any great length of time on the rack of suspense.

"When this smelly relative of yours left New York last Monday where do you suppose he went?" asked Emile with a most exasperating sneer.

The question was a revelation to Connors, who supposed that he alone possessed knowledge bearing on Captain Jake's secret mission and the day of his departure. It also filled him with apprehension. To ignore Emile completely would be folly, and yet it annoyed Connors to find that he was being roughly shouldered by his own bartender. If Emile had gained a full, or partial knowledge of the monetary rewards that were to follow the successful issue of Jake's venture, he would certainly demand a share of the spoils—hence Connors's decision to assume a confidential, chatty manner for the purpose of drawing the man on.

"I don't hafta do no supposin' at all, Emile—I know," was Connors's reply. "Jake went to Washington."

"Yeh!" was Emile's sneering comment, with a rising inflection that was saturated with contempt.

"Sure, he went there on big business. Excuse me, Emile, if I don't draw you no diagram of Captain Jake's little trip, but I'll say this: he's liable to see th' Secretary of State down there. I don't know—maybe Jake's going to stay at his house all night, talking things over, or somethin' like that. I tell you, Emile, it's big."

"Down in Washington!" Emile derisively wagged his head.

"Of course. I oughta know, when I went

to the station with him, and just as the train was starting says to him: 'So-long, Jake, take good care of yourself!'"

"He couldn't have got off that train this side of Rahway or nothin' like that—could he?"

Consternation was fast crowding surprise from Connors's face. There was no mistaking the assurance with which Emile had asked his question.

"What do you mean—this side of Rahway?" Connors blustered.

"I mean that Captain Jake never went to Washington, but came right back to New York, after he kissed you good-by. I mean that he cleared for Boston last Tuesday. His old tub hit the Sound just about the time you thought he'd be asking the Secretary of State for a little more demi-tasse."

Connors clutched the bar to steady himself. His implicit faith in Captain Jake was shaken. He began to understand why a full week had slipped by without receiving any word from him.

"I'm good for ap-a-pelly," he moaned. "And me thinking that this international bunk was easy money. Listen, Emile, there ain't no foreign government tremblin' wit' nervous prostration on account of what Jake brought to New York and wished on me. No easy money—no nothing. Do you know what that swab-eared Jake's last words to me was?"

"What?"

"'Chink-nail,' said he, 'before the end of the week, you and I will be up at the Hoffman House, eating with a certain foreign ambassador. We'll be exchanging the results of my per'lous voyage for real money.' That's what he says to me, and of course, Emile, I was going to look after your interests, I was. There I was, saying to myself: Emile's got to be in on this—and—"

"Sure," interrupted Emile, who was satisfied with the progress he was making.

"And here I've been flossied by the man I learned to call 'Uncle' at my mother's knee," finished Connors with a sigh that reflected confusion and uncertainty.

Emile had been scrutinizing the few Crack'r Pot patrons that were scattered about the room. Evidently he was satis-

fied, as he beckoned for Connors to accompany him to the back room.

The crestfallen autocrat obeyed without protest.

"Sit down," said Emile, pulling a chair up to one of the tables. Then he leaned across the board and motioned for Connors to draw near.

"Jake told the truth," he whispered. "You've got a fortune right in your hands—something that can be turned into gold—do you get it? Gold, I say!"

"Nice words, Emile, and I gives you credit. You mean all right."

"I'm all right and I can prove it, but first I want to ask you a question: Where do I come in on this? Seems to me that my interests what you was talking about ought to be understood."

Emile, if I could trust my bartender as easy as he can trust his boss we wouldn't need no lawyer. I'm square—I got to be—you have been giving me quotations right off my own stock ticker. You gets half."

"All right—now, listen. Those sailors came into this port on Captain Jake's schooner—didn't they?"

"I suppose so."

"Very well. They say that everything is straight. I talked with them for a half hour."

Connors winced.

"This is our chance to check him up. Where did Jake say he began this voyage?"

"Said that he beat it up from the Gulf of Guinea," answered Connors, chewing on the unlighted stub between his teeth.

"That agrees with my information—what next?"

Connors paused before answering. It flashed through his mind that in reality he was giving Emile more information than he was receiving.

"Made his first stop at the Azores," he finally replied.

"Correct. Now get this—they were at Fayal, where Jake's got more friends than he has in New York, and one of his pals there tipped him off that the Portuguese gov'n't was burnin' up the cables with messages to look out for a certain schooner that was making for the States and to delay its sailing—by all means."

CRAFTY ROGUES

"You will have to excuse me, Emile. If I don't stamp my feet and whistle, like as if I was up in the gallery at Harry Miner's—but, honest, Emilie, these sailors don't make no hit with me."

"Why not?"

"Because I know Jake. He ain't leaving no valuable prop'ty behind him."

Emile was far too clever to belittle the wisdom of Connors's reply. He knew there was some truth in it. Captain Jake was as avaricious as he was cunning; a bold and crafty manipulator who seldom left anything to chance. Connors might be right. Jake would hardly absent himself from the place of concealment if his mysterious cargo was worth all he claimed. Then again—had he really gone to Boston?

Emile was not sure. The information came straight enough, but even so, it might be part of Jake's plan to confuse the situation, for the purpose of furthering his dark schemes.

"Well—I'll admit that he wouldn't be apt to," said Emile, rather reluctantly, "but you never can tell. Anyway, I know how you can bring the entire thing to a head."

"How?"

"By taking a little trip to Boston. That's the only way you will find him."

The thought of surrendering such valued revenues as the Cracker Pot receipts to the option of his bartender cast no roseate hues in Connors's mind, although he saw that the suggestion had a grain of wisdom in it.

"What would I do after I got there?" he asked.

"Comb the wharves until you got a line on his schooner."

"I might take Eddie Carbon with me," mused Connors. "That coon would smell out Jake's creaking old hulk, if he got within a mile of it. Eddie's the only good luck Jake ever brought me. Honest, Emile, did you ever hear anybody love a pianner the way he does?"

"You can't take Eddie."

"Why not?"

"Because Jake left him here to look after the stuff. He's the only man that dares to go in that cellar. I wouldn't put my head in that pit for a block of houses. Eddie stays here."

Then it's all off. I don't go to Boston—the Cracker Pot for mine,' says which, Connors strode out of the room.

As he did so Joie the Jug slouched in and seated himself at the table with Emile.

"How's things breakin'?" he asked.

"Can't say yet. You see, I'm shiftin' round first on one leg, then on the other. Gettin' my information from too many dead ones, but I'll have my bearings in the next twenty-four hours—then I'll know how to act. Get out of here. I don't want Connors to see me talking to you. Beat it!"

Connors was uneasy. In a few minutes he returned and once more seated himself at the table opposite Emile.

"Of course you can suit yourself about this Boston trip," said Emile. "But I can tell you this: if you don't find Jake and bring him back to New York there isn't going to be any Cracker Pot. Those sailors say that you are standing in with Jake on some deal that cuts them out, and they are going to give you just three days to produce him. Three days, then they shoots up the Cracker Pot. Have you got it?"

"That's just my luck," Connors moaned. "Here I've been slavin' to make this a nice, respectable, little business, and along comes this swivel-eyed Jake and busts up my life's savings. How's a man goin' to make an honest livin' any more? You know all the trouble I've had—with this new reform—and Sunday closin', and all that. I tell you, Emile, it's up wit' the shutters for me just as soon as the first gun pops. Why, only last week the captain of this district says to me: 'You're doin' all right, Connors, but the broad highway for yours as soon as any rough stuff commences.' It's a shame—me standin' all O. K. wit' th' police—and—"

"Shut up!" whispered Emile. "Here comes a plainclothesman now."

CHAPTER II.

THE BIBLE-BANGER.

THE street door had opened and a heavy-set, square-jawed man made his way across the sawdust-covered floor. Instantly the soggy, smoke-banked at-

mosphere of the Cracker Pot seemed charged with nervous tension. The big fellow's face was far too familiar to some of them. The "live ones" in front of the bar took refuge in grim silence. In the dance hall Eddie Carbon came to a dead center among the high notes of a wonderful musical wallop. There was a restless shuffling of feet and the face of a young woman peered into the ladies' parlor—it was bloodless, strained, and gaunt.

Connors alone was master of his nerves. He had to be. It was his business, and, besides that, he was a fatalist. "You got to let 'em pin *crêpe* on the front door when the undertaker comes," was one of his pet maxims.

All formalities were dispensed with by the clean-cut representative of the law. He walked straight up to Connors.

"The captain wants to see you," he announced.

"Sure," responded Connors, replacing the frayed cigar with a fat, poisonous looking member.

"Right away," added the brisk minion of the law.

"Of course," replied Connors, who in some respects was now at his best. He had no idea what the peremptory summons might signify, and at the moment did not know what scheme of evasion he would employ if the captain's object was to question him concerning Jake's mysterious enterprise. One thing, however, was certain: this was no raid on the Cracker Pot.

He moved toward the door with the officer. Standing near it was the Cracker Pot's oldest customer—Joie the Jug. Under ordinary circumstances Connors would have ignored him, but now he was willing to capitalize even this small and meager asset. He was likewise desirous of flashing a message to Eddie Carbon, who had hurried forward as soon as the first note of alarm had reached the dance hall.

Therefore, in passing out, Connors patted the forlorn weakling on the back and said: "Look here, Joie, how many times have I asked you to quit spending in this place? You got a family, Joie, and I hopes I won't have to ask you no more to stay out of here."

Then with a warning wink to the negro he added: "Eddie, I'm going out for a few minutes with my frien' here, so look after all of my interests in the back room while I'm gone—will yuh—Eddie?"

As Connors passed out with his "frien'" the negro hurried into the dance hall, where he lifted a trap door in the rear of the piano platform and disappeared into the black shadows below.

On his way to the station house Connors's mind was active. He was extremely anxious to learn whether Captain Jake's nefarious project had anything to do with what he felt was to be a third degree session, and wondered if the "special" at his side knew. He decided to approach the subject as adroitly as possible.

"Did you see that black man?" he asked.

"Yes."

"He's the best pianner tickler in America. He can choke a pianner to death with its own harmony."

Connors's jocularity was not drawing the applause he anticipated, but an overpowering desire to coax the officer into conversation impelled him to blunder on: "Yep, he's a wonder. Ain't had him long, either. He came in on a schooner with a relative of mine; a trip around the world, or somethin' like that."

It was no use. If this silent, reserved officer knew aught of Captain Jake's bold venture, or of Connors's affiliated interests, it was not his intention to divulge it.

Therefore, silence reigned until they mounted the station house steps between the flickering green lights. Then he spoke.

"Wait here," he commanded, indicating a small room opposite the captain's headquarters.

A moment later the officer stood before the desk.

"Did you bring him?" asked the captain while a grim sort of smile flickered under his heavy mustache.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me—have we got anything on him?"

"Very little. He's clever and to a certain extent square. The scum of the river front gather there every night, but somehow he manages to hold them in line. In

starting a round-up, it's the first place I look for my man, as he will go there sooner or later."

"They'll nest there as long as the place is open, but scatter when it's closed—is that the idea?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if we can keep a bit of wholesome fear in this man Connors it will serve our purpose better to let him remain open, for a while at least, but at the same time we have got to make some concession to the wave of reform that is now sweeping the city. The whole town has jumped into this uplift game, and it is growing by the hour. My friends uptown telephoned again right after you left. They wanted to know if I had found a place for them. This was what I had in mind in sending for Connors. Some of the best people in New York are behind the movement, and I want them to feel that the department indorses their action."

Here the telephone rang and the captain picked up the receiver and listened attentively.

"Not yet," he said, evidently responding to some question. "Call me up in five minutes. Yes, I will be ready in that time."

Again he turned to the plainclothesman.

"The past record of this man. Can we play it up?"

"That's the strange end of it. He's clean. I'll tell you what you can do, though. Rake up the reputation of the place before he took it over."

"Fine—bring him in."

Connors entered with the evident intention of sustaining his jocose mood. His mouth was set with a stage-property smile that congealed into an expression of indecision the moment he caught sight of Captain Wallers's stern countenance.

The officer who had ushered him into the chamber of torture was an adept in the art of administering all those chilling injections which are supposed to benumb the human *ego* upon such an occasion.

"Stand here," he commanded. "A little farther over—there. Give me that hat. Take the dribble of tobacco from your chin."

In the meantime the captain had not

deigned to look up; when he finally did it was to plunge into his subject:

"I'm getting some bad reports about you, Connors, and I'm thinking of closing you up."

The perspiration could be seen to form across Connors's brow.

"Captain, I tells you the truth—I'm jumping in me sleep with nervousness to keep that place right. Honest, there ain't been no gents robbed, or suicides, or nothing. Just ask the boys, captain. There ain't a scratch on the blotter against me."

"What's that?" thundered the captain. "That place has given us more trouble than any other resort in the precinct."

"Sure, but, captain, I asks you, please. Give me a chance. That was before my time—honest!"

Connors again turned to the officer.

"Did you see Joie—the fellow I spoke to? He's an example of that place before I came—lost all he had, and now I'm trying to make a man of him."

"Who ran that den before this man came along?" asked the captain.

"It was a gambling house," answered the officer, "and must be crooked from the foundation up, because we made four raids the year before you came to this precinct and always found it empty by the time we broke in."

"Order out a detail of men—I shall investigate that place myself."

If Connors had turned white before he was ghastly now. The mere thought of such a thing paralyzed him. At any other time it might have been turned to his ultimate advantage, but now! What sort of an explanation could he make concerning the revelations that would surely follow the moment the captain entered the cellar under the dance hall? Was ever a man in so much trouble, he thought? What a horrible mess!

The minutes went by. Connors could hear the preparations that were going forward in the next room. This was the end, so far as he was concerned.

Again the telephone on the captain's desk rang.

"Hello—no—not yet," said the captain, "but an idea has just come to me. Hold the line a moment."

Then he turned to Connors.

"How large is that dance hall of yours?"
"Thirty by sixty," replied Connors.

"How would a room thirty by sixty do?" questioned the captain through the receiver.

"Yes—you can get that," he added.

As he finished speaking, Connors noted that his mood had changed.

"I shall defer my examination of your place, Connors, for the present. A personal friend of mine uptown—a young clergyman—wants to come down in my precinct to-night, and hold a mission service. That was him on the wire. I want you to let him have the Cracker Pot. Does it go?"

At any other time Connors would have stood aghast at such a proposition, but now it loomed up in front of him as a miracle. This would give him time to think; time to locate Captain Jake and disentangle himself from an unsavory alliance. Certainly the captain's friend could have the dance hall—why, Captain Wallers had almost asked it as a personal favor. There was no doubt in Connors's mind as to what kind of a man this gospel sharp was. It was quite clear to him. He was a squirrel—a bit of a religious nut, but never mind. Captain Wallers had made the request.

Great possibilities began to swirl through his mind. What was the loss of one night's receipts to the possible advertising that might follow if Newspaper Row saw good copy in this Cracker Pot meeting. Why not boost it—make it a howling success? Steve Brody had to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge before the silk hats and top coats began to come down from Fifth Avenue. This would be soft in comparison.

"Leave it to me, captain," he replied with a dramatic wave of the hand. "Leave it to me. I'll make that bunch of dock rats in the Cracker Pot get religion if you say this Bible-banger is on the level."

"I guess they need it," the captain answered.

As Connors went down the station house steps the officer who had summoned him turned to Captain Wallers, whose face was expanded in a huge grin.

"Not so bad—was it?" questioned the captain.

"I should say not," responded the officer.

"But if you had made your request without setting up the scenery he would have refused."

"I was aware of that," said the captain, taking up the telephone for the purpose of notifying his friends that they might avail themselves of the use of the Cracker Pot for the proposed meeting.

As Connors walked back to his establishment confidence returned. The mental jam began to break up. Captain Wallers did not know of Jake's mysterious use of the dance hall cellar—that was the first big stick to slide into placid waters and, so far as Connors was concerned, it was the key log.

Entering the dance hall he saw that the flow of spirits, both animal and distilled, had become normal under the inspiration of Eddie Carbon's music—some of his own steam-drill compositions.

A few moments later both the negro and Emile went into secret conference with Connors and were evidently satisfied with the latter's report and the declaration that so far as his trip to the station house was concerned "there was nothing to it."

Then he made his way to the platform.

"Frien's," he began, "you got to hand it to Chink-nail Connors for keeping everybody happy. You know—just like one big family. And now you is all going to do me a personal favor, and maybe I'm going to put your picters in the papers. There's a frien' of mine uptown that's the barker for a nice, respectable congregation, and he says to me, 'Connors, I hears a whole lot about your place, and some night I want to come down and put the gospel syringe right into the hearts of them frien's of yours.'

"'Certainly,' I says to him. So he's coming down to-night—see? And we all got to be nice and polite. You know how it is—some of you ought to get kind of sore about your past life. Of course, I ain't going to ask no one to do anything that's against his self-respect, or nothing like that, but I got to do something that will be classy—for my frien'. So I'm going to ask Joie to try and bust up the meetin'—that 'll give me a chance to run Joie out, and be treatin' this gospil man square."

"I ought to get about two dollars for that—huh?" said Joie from the audience.

"Leave it to me, Joie; leave it to me. Then, if no one objects, we'll have Emile come walking down to the platform, untying his apron. He's goin' to walk right up and say: 'I'm through wit' rum.' That'll be a good one. And now, kind frien's, I thanks you. Shoot a little harmony there, Eddie, will yuh?"

To the credit of the nondescript assembly of Cracker Pot patrons but one applauded Connors's announcement, and that was Joie the Jug, whose monetary interest prompted the outburst.

Even Eddie Carbon's masterpiece, wherein the correct staccato touch was secured by shooting a bullet at the big brass gong on the wall, failed to dispel the near-gloom that seemed about to settle.

Of the forty odd men and women six walked out.

Much sooner than Connors had believed it possible the street door opened, and Captain Wallers's official representative ushered a small group of mission workers into the Cracker Pot. The party consisted of four men and two women. The former carried a small portable melodeon, which they placed upon the dance hall platform.

The clergyman, whom Connors had designated as the Bible-banger, was a young man, not over twenty-six. He was about five foot ten in height, and as clean as the proverbial whistle in limb and carriage. As he walked to the rear of the hall Connors noted the free swing and springy step of a man in perfect health.

There was no patronizing condescension in the greeting he exchanged with Connors. It was an honest grasp of the hand, accompanied by a wholesome smile.

Without confusion this little group seated themselves on the platform, and the clergyman assumed leadership.

"Miss Darwin will sing for us," he announced.

A young woman took her place at the instrument. She was dressed in white, and every line of her face reflected idealism and refinement.

As her mellow contralto notes voiced the words of a simple hymn silence reigned.

It was a voice rich in sympathy and it carried the gracious personality of the singer to every sin-tarnished soul in the Cracked Pot audience. Even Connors recognized the folly of attempting to stage his crude drama of "repentant sinners."

Emile had tiptoed his way into the barroom. Joie the Jug had followed him.

Connors found himself staring, stupidly, at the young clergyman. He seemed to be fascinated. Where had he seen him before?

As the singer concluded there was a moment of silence, and in that brief space something occurred which startled every one in the hall. It was a low growl that apparently came from beneath the floor and might have emanated from a human throat, except for its peculiar volume. This alone was sufficient to alarm, but, accompanied as it was by the distinct clank of a chain, it caused a thrill of apprehension to sweep over the audience.

Eddie Carbon arose from his seat, but sank back as Connors signaled him to remain quiet.

It was the training of the clergyman that bridged the situation. He was accustomed to interruptions. Quick to divert the minds of a distracted audience, ignoring the strange occurrence, he stepped to the front of the platform and began to speak.

There was no text; no reduction of sacred multiples by a common denominator of slang; no priestly monotones; no eloquent flights. It was a simple talk as one who would speak—man to man.

"I have no patience with the man who tells me that life is easy, for I know that there is a tragedy in every human heart. If I but knew some of you better, I am sure that I would find men of heroic mold. I believe that there are men here who would go the limit to help a pal. Friends, this is the best within you, coming to the surface; the bit of good within mankind—floating, because it was made to ride the troubled waters. Listen, men, it is more. It is God's life preserver for humanity. The life belt that will hold you up until the Great Skipper sends out the long boat to rescue you from the tempestuous seas."

In this simple fashion he ended his talk, and no one was more surprised than Connors

to discover that it was all over. But there could be no mistake. The clergyman had stepped down from the platform for the purpose of shaking hands with his audience.

Once more Connors scrutinized the clergyman's face carefully. Where had he seen him before? One thing was certain—it was during the pre-Bowery days.

"Mr. Connors, we want to thank you for the use of your hall and hope that you will allow us to come again. I feel assured that some of these people would favor me with their friendship," said the clergyman, approaching Connors.

"Sure, they will," responded the proprietor. "Cer'nly, they'll be frien's wit' you. Say—if they likes you down here they'll shoot th' whiskers often anybody that's sore on you. All you got to do is tell 'em—see? Just point 'em out and say: 'There's a gent whose face I don't like.' *Bing*—off goes his spinich."

Whereupon the young clergyman gave evidence of possessing the saving grace of humor, for he laughed—long and heartily.

"That's fine," he said. "And now, Mr. Connors, I will bid you good night—come and see me some time."

As the street door closed behind the mission party, Connors saw the folly of trying to mix religion and pleasure in the Cracker Pot punch bowl—at least, from the standpoint of profit. Within ten minutes the place was empty. Eddie had made for the trapdoor at the moment of the mission workers' departure. Emile was talking to Joie the Jug—the only person in the barroom. Therefore Connors seated himself at one of the tables to think.

"Well, he's scrapped the night's receipts!" was the burden of his intellectual labor. "But I like him. Who'd a' thought it? He's human."

Just then one of the mission party returned for some music, which had been forgotten.

"'Scuse me," said Connors. "but what synagogue does this preaching gent of yours work in?"

"He is the pastor of a Madison Avenue church," was the smiling answer.

"Do you mind writing his name on a piece of paper?"

Glad to do it."

Without thanking him, Connors leaned forward on the table and studied the bit of paper. Occasionally he would lean back and gaze at the ceiling, then renew his fixed attention to the name on the slip before him. At last a smile came over his face.

"It's him! Who'd a' thought it? The smart little devil."

The words were scarcely uttered when a burly figure dropped into a chair on the opposite side of the table. Then a second stalwart chap appropriated the one next to him. Following them came a third, and finally a fourth man.

They were the sailors who were so anxious to meet Captain Jake.

CHAPTER III.

"THE JUGGLING SAILOR."

THEY were as merciless a looking quartet as ever trod the deck of a ship; grizzled dogs of the sea of an age now long since passed.

"Hot rum is what we drinks, and it's going to be on the house," announced the leader, striking the table with his fists so hard that even the matches seemed frightened and jumped out of the conical little receptacle which held them. The other three nodded in approval.

Then all four glared at Connors.

"Of course," he replied. "Emile, bring four brimstones for th' rummies."

"And after that—four more," shouted the leader to Emile.

Connors had become hard as nail. Selfishness might prompt him to whine a bit when his personal interests were touched, but he was no coward. Far from it. He took a bunch of keys from his pocket, threw them on the table and with freezing sarcasm remarked:

"This one opens the front door, that one the safe, and if you'll run in to-morrow I'll introduce you at the bank."

"Cut th' funny stuff," warned the gruff leader with a slicing thrust of his hand across the board. Then he frowned at his companions, as if to assure them of his frightful frame of mind.

"Sure," said Connors. "And now that we all got seats we will ask the wild man from Borneo to bring out his little box of tricks so the show can start. What you got up your sleeve?"

"Where is Captain Jake?" asked the leader, leaning across the table.

"I don't know," was Connors's curt reply.

The big ruffian riveted his gaze on Connors as if he would draw the truth from him at all hazards, and his rage was fanned by the evasive answer.

"You lie!" he shouted.

Connors was a prizefighter, and these few words had always formed the verbal prelude that led to trouble. In an instant he had found his feet—and just as quickly changed his mind and sunk back into his chair. There was nothing charitable about this change of heart. It had been prompted by the persuasive powers of three wicked-looking guns that had suddenly appeared on the table.

The big sailor had not moved, or shown any excitement. On the contrary, he had tilted his chair back and was smiling. It was a brutal sort of grin, and at the moment Connors was fascinated by its glint of cleverness. Throughout the evening, problems had been assailing Connors with great rapidity and he therefore found it comparatively easy to entertain another one. Who was this big brute of a sailor? Had he been a member of Captain Jake's crew? He glanced at the fellow's hands and was startled to discover they were long and slim. They were deft and flexible, while the hands of his companions were tar-stained at every crack and lin. Then again the man's speech was not that of the Water Street sailor. It was too glib. Too oily, by far.

"I hopes you won't leave 'fore the show is over," the big one continued. "We all hopes that—don't we, mates? You see, I don't do no tricks. I juggles."

He had brought his chair down again with all four legs resting on the floor, and was leaning back in an easy attitude. At the same time he had drawn a murderous-looking dirk from his belt and was toying with it.

"I juggles—I does," he repeated.

Then, without looking up, but with eyes fastened upon Connors, he tossed the ivory handled blade ceilingward, as if it mattered not how high it might soar, or what might happen.

Connors followed the turning, flashing blade in its flight—saw it strike, point upward, in the ceiling, where it quivered for an instant—then fell, striking the table, point downward, where it penetrated to the depth of a full half inch.

It was the cold, calculating precision of the thing that made such an impression upon Connors.

"Now," said the big fellow, "I asks you again—where is this here Captain Jake?"

Connors, who had been weighing every word and act, caught the false ring of the words "this here." Had this juggling sailor been a member of Jake's crew he would have asked: "Where is Captain Jake?"

"Looka here, gents," began Connors, wishing to evade the issue, "you're off your course. I ain't no human lighthouse. What's the idea, anyway, coming to me?"

"Easy answered," replied the big chap. "We comes because you is the monkey that's going to thrown down the coconut. You climbs the tree. Jake came to New York because he knew that you were crooked enough to help him put his deal over—that was what he told us—not so, lads?"

The three sailors nodded their confirmation.

"The minute he gets here he tries to throw us down, so we comes to you. He's a nice one, he is, to go and hide on his pals, but we knows who's going to smoke him out. Yes, sir!"

A brilliant idea came to Connors. He would tell them the truth, so far as he knew it. His faith in Jake and his wild scheme was on the wane. The secret he was carrying had become burdensome. It was deep stuff. At best, he could not grasp it. Between the revelations made in part by Jake, the insinuations of Emile, the demands of the sailors, and Captain Wallers's threat to give the Cracker Pot the regulation acid test, he was sick of it all. As it stood, they all seemed to have more information than he did. All he knew was that Jake had

loaded him up with trouble. Let these salt-air sniffers comb the Boston Harbor themselves if they wanted to find Captain Jake so badly. As for himself, he was not sure that Jake had gone there. If he could have been fooled about Washington, Emile might have also been led astray concerning Boston. At any rate, the whole business was slippery.

"I'll tell you the truth," he said.

"That's it—now we are getting a bit of breeze in our canvas."

"He's in Boston."

"That's it—that's it. How soon can you get him back to New York?"

"How soon! Say, I've told you where he is; now go after him yourself."

"Nothing doing, Mr. Chink-nail. We don't do business that way. We got to stay right here under the coconut tree. Listen, we gives you three days to bring him back to New York. Three days, mind you, and if you don't deliver this dog-eared skipper by that time, we shoots the Cracker Pot so full of holes it'll look like a starry night."

With this ultimatum, they all arose and walked toward the barroom, while Connors remained seated at the table.

At the door they paused and the juggling sailor collected the three guns; one from each of his companions. Following this he motioned for them to stand aside. Then with his right hand he began to juggle with the three weapons—tossing them in the air, and catching them as easy as if they were wooden balls.

As Connors watched the sailor did something which startled him, although he was more or less familiar with the work of professional jugglers.

In rapid succession, without disturbing the order of the revolving guns, he had fired each one as it came to his hand, sending each bullet with a crash against Eddie Carbon's musical gong, and when the last shot had been fired all three guns were still circling through the air, whirling about in a drift of smoke.

As each bullet struck the bell clanged.

"How many times did I ring the gong?" asked the big fellow as he handed his companion their respective weapons.

"Three," was Connors's prompt reply.

"Right—one for each day. Three of 'em in which to produce this skunk of a captain."

Here he bestowed a grin of confidence on his villainous-looking companions, after which they walked out of the Cracker Pot.

Connors remained seated at the table for some time. He thought that there might be some trick involved, and momentarily expected their return. Not until Emile's face appeared at the door did he move.

"What did I tell you?" his bartender questioned with brazen effrontery.

Had Connors followed his inclinations at that particular moment, he would have licked his bartender, and it is reasonable to assume that the job would have redounded to his credit, as his nerves were a bit ragged. However, wisdom prevailed.

He arose and went to the door where Emile stood.

"Did you ever read the lives of any of the big captains of industry?" he asked, eying Emile menacingly.

"Certainly."

"Well, all them fellows made big fortunes by minding their own business. Beat it—I'll ring a bell when I want you."

Then he pushed him through the doorway, after which he locked the door.

Again he seated himself at the table, and tried to catch some dangling thread of thought that would help to unravel the fast-tangling mass of mysterious events. Finally he went behind the platform and rapped on the trapdoor. "Come up, Eddie," he called in low tones.

The negro promptly responded to the call.

"Did you hear any shooting?" asked Connors.

"Sure—somebody was bustin' lead on mah musical gong," was Carbon's reply.

"Eddie, I want to ask you an important question. Did you have a sailor on board Jake's schooner who could juggle with knives and things?"

"Sure—they was all jugglers on board the Bessie Bowles. Sword swallowers, wif beans on 'em. That's all."

"Nobody on board that could do any fancy work? You know—" Connors illus-

trated by giving a dumb show of catching objects from the air.

"No, boss, nothin' like that. Only just dumb stuff."

"Then somebody is trying to put something over," said Connors.

Once more he sat down to think, while Eddie Carbon returned to his charge.

For the first time Connors was confused. He tried to recall the vague, indefinite promises of fabulous wealth that had been made by Captain Jake, the details of which were to be divulged as soon as the skipper returned from Washington. Bit by bit he tried to piece it all together; all the mysterious fragments, starting with Jake's voyage from New York seven years before. Connors was a younger man then, and Jake had swayed his mind by wondrous stories of adventure.

Jake, at that time, was his idol. He winced as he thought of it. Could it have been possible that he had actually been so foolish as to induce some of his friends to back Jake's hair-brained scheme? Everybody was to be made rich from that Congo venture. Jake could be trusted—he was square. The stuff was there and the dumb natives did not know its value. No one really knew whether it was diamonds, gold, or ivory; but the stuff was there, just waiting for some one to come and scoop it. Certainly Jake knew—why, he could have married an African queen on one of his trips if he had wanted to. It sure was easy.

Seven years—then Jake showed up one night. Could he make use of the Cracker Pot? Certainly, but what for? Oh, he would explain the whole thing next day.

That night Jake reached the Cracker Pot about 2 A.M. Extreme caution was necessary. Jake would allow a light in the cellar only. Had it not been for the corner street lamp both the barroom and the dance hall would have been in total darkness. Several queer-looking bundles were carried in and a host of foreign smells accompanied them. There were also vague shapes that silently passed Connors in the darkness. The whole thing was creepy and it made him uncomfortable—so much so that Jake was afraid he would weaken, and told him to stay out of the cellar.

"Just 'tend to your business and leave everything to Eddie Carbon—that is what I brought him along for," Jake had said. And now he had mysteriously disappeared. For the first time Connors was just as anxious as anybody else to locate this slippery skipper. In fact, it was absolutely necessary to find him. The worst of it was he could not trust Emile. Were it not for this he would chance the Boston trip and take the midnight express.

He started to look at his watch, and in doing so, became aware of the fact that the little slip of paper with the clergyman's address on it was still in his hand.

He slowly unrolled it.

Then a smile broke over Connors's worried face.

"I got it, and so help me Bob, I'll do it," he exclaimed.

Within a half hour Connors boarded a train at Chatham Square for the purpose of executing what he considered to be a most brilliant scheme.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LADIES' PARLOR.

As his train rattled north through the Bowery Connors again studied his bit of crumpled paper. This was the name written by the mission worker:

The Rev. Bruce De Lisle.

"If he's a regular guy he'll do it," muttered Connors.

At Fifty-Third Street he left the train, and descending to the street once more examined the valued slip of paper. The address given proved to be in one of the most aristocratic sections of the city, a part of New York that had been erected in the brownstone age—that pre-victrola and antipianola period, in which the silk hat and Brewster carriage were still found among the flora and fauna of Fifth Avenue.

Within ten minutes after leaving the Elevated station Connors stood before the massive residence that had the honor of being the rectory of the most fashionable church in Manhattan.

Had the broad stone steps before him

been the Golden Stairs they would have made no greater impression on Connors.

"I'll bet myself a new hat I don't get in." Discouragement overwhelmed him as he stood in the vestibule fumbling for the bell.

A moment later the door was opened by a butler whose dignity was in keeping with the correctness of his apparel. For a moment it staggered Connors to find himself confronted by an array of brass buttons so suggestive of the police department. In fact, he missed saluting by a very narrow margin.

"Is—the—er—" he began, edging nearer the light so as to get the exact form of clerical address from his paper.

"The—er—" He was forced to give it up. "You know—his nibs—is he in?"

"Do you refer to the Rev. Bruce de Lisle?" asked the punctilious butler.

"Sure, tell his reverence that the Hon. Chink-nail Connors, of the Cracker Pot Café, has come."

Connors was trying to hide his embarrassment under a cloak of paralyzing good humor.

"Yes, sir," said the diplomatic servant, without moving an inch.

"What you got—sore feet?" asked Connors, sarcastically.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Whom did you say had called?"

"They ain't no 'had' about it. I'm here now."

"Did you say 'Connors'?" asked the horrified butler.

"Yes, sweetheart."

"Very well, sir. He's in his study. I'll see if it will be convenient for him to grant an audience."

"Hold on," exclaimed Connors. "Let's get a new deck and play the game without the joker. Come out on the pezaza and pipe the street. They ain't no audience waiting to see him—just me, Chink-nail Connors—that's all."

By this time the unusual commotion at the door had aroused the curiosity of Bruce de Lisle and he came down from his study.

"Connors!" he exclaimed. "Well—well. Come in."

Had he been one of the church wardens, Connors could not have received a more

cordial greeting and soon found himself seated in the aforesaid study on the second floor.

"Now, Mr. Connors, what can I do for you?" asked the clergyman, who, although a trifle nonplussed by the speed with which Connors had accepted his invitation to call, was nevertheless prepared for almost anything.

To his surprise, Connors was finding it difficult to proceed. Seated on the edge of his chair, he was evidently undergoing the tortures of uncertainty. First he would grin as if anticipating momentary recognition. Then his hands, as if conscious of their valued aid to speech, would attempt a dumb show of responsiveness. At last his mouth opened.

"I want you to come down and run the Cracker Pot for me while I go to Boston," said Connors without batting an eye.

The Rev. Bruce de Lisle was a man of keen perception. He seldom made the error of underestimating his man. Each human unit that crossed his path was to be met with an open mind, considered without bias. He had no idea what was behind Connors's startling request, but would treat the man that had made it with respect. The psychological study alone would be worthy of his patience and further interest.

"Why do you come to me, Connors, a perfect stranger, with a request of this character?" he quietly asked.

Instead of answering Connors gave a hurried glance about the room, then he arose and opened the door leading to the hall, as if to make sure that the officious butler was not within hearing.

"Mr. Bruce," he began, "you haven't got me, and you didn't get me to-night when I met you in the Cracker Pot, but I'm square and I got the goods wit' me. I asks you fair—do you remember this?"

Pushing back the chairs he cleared a small space in front of the now astonished clergyman. Then he threw himself into the aggressive crouch of the pugilist, and as light as a rubber ball, danced about what to him was evidently the focal center of an imaginary punching bag. His ease and grace were phenomenal; a veritable wildcat on springs.

As he paused there was an exclamation of recognition from the young clergyman.

"That is Jimmie Connors's third lesson in shadow punching. I did not recognize you."

"Sure," said Connors as they clasped hands.

Even as Connors had taken his "first position" the full significance of the strange request and the man's right to make it, had swept through the mind of Bruce de Lisle, but for the moment he was amused by the cleverness with which the memories of other days had been conjured up. "The really good days." True, it was the big things that had made those student days at New Brunswick worth while, and Connors's Athletic Club had no right to any such classification—all this he knew. But the mere recollection of the fellows who used to gather there—the freedom from restraint—the tests of physical strength. Oh, there were a thousand splendid memories that welled up!

One of his treasured photographs was that of an old building down on the river front near the bottling works; a dingy butcher shop below—Connors's club on the floor above.

"Do you remember the night I was introduced to the club, Connors?" he asked.

"Do I remember?" said Connors. "The night I tried you out—don't be afraid, says I. Shoot out your mitt—I'm here to get killed, I am. And then—oh, Lizzie! The mule kicked, and the lightening came. Also the floor came up and stuck splinters in my curly locks, and I went to sleep and heard the angels sing."

The Rev. Bruce de Lisle was enjoying the best all-around laugh he had indulged in for years—a laugh that was medicine to his bones. The silliest kind of mirth tears were blinding his eyes.

"And in due season—you came back," added Bruce.

"Sure, in due season," said Connors. "I lifts my head from the floor and asks: 'Was many citizens killed by the earthquake?'"

"But it never made any difference in our friendship—did it?" questioned the smiling clergyman.

"Make any difference! Sure, it made

a difference. That was why I loved you. Listen, Mr. Bruce. I'm square. I tells the truth, I does. The day you took a chance and bucked the river in the worst flood the old town ever knew—you remember it?—you were all in, and threw up your hands—threw 'em up and yelled 'Help!' Do you know why I said my prayers quick and kicked in after you, Mr. Bruce?"

"Why, Connors?"

"Because I remembered that punch."

"And after you had rolled the yellow waters of the Raritan out of me I said: 'Connors, you have saved my life. Call on me whenever I can be of any service to you.'"

For the first time during the conversation Connors's head sagged a bit.

"That's what's bothering me, Mr. Bruce. I don't want you to think that I'm going to rock the boat. I—you know. I cashed in on that promise once before."

Bruce smiled. "You refer to my investment in the Congo Products Company?" he asked.

Connors expressed his affirmation by a sheepish nod that gave evidence of his embarrassment.

"Tell me," continued Bruce, "whatever became of the seafaring relative of yours—did he ever come back?"

"That's my trouble right now, Mr. Bruce, and this is the only time in my life that I regrets my lack of education."

"Why, Connors?"

"I could do so much better if I knew just what kind of nice polite cuss words I could use in talking to you about this yellow-skinned, puppy-eyed, soggy—"

"Easy, Connors," interrupted the young clergyman. "I overheard part of your conversation at the door and on the strength of that will suggest that we start all over with a new deck—and make it a clean one this time. What has Captain Jake done now?"

As Connors was about to launch out into a full recital of his troubles the door bell rang.

"Just a moment, Connors. I think that this caller is also an old friend of yours. Andrew Bailey—do you remember the name?"

"Fat Andy?"

Yes, I think we used to call him that at New Brunswick. He usually drops in Saturday night, and I know he will be glad to see you. Do not hesitate about relating your troubles concerning Captain Jake in his presence, as he will undoubtedly remember him."

As Bruce de Lisle surmised, his caller proved to be Andrew Bailey, the self-appointed advisory board of one in the mundane affairs of his clerical friend. Also New York correspondent of the *Chicago Clarion*.

The warmth of Bailey's greeting gave Connors the assurance he seemed to be in need of, whereupon he poured out his full measure of woe. As he concluded Bruce de Lisle spoke:

"But, Connors, you have not made it clear at all as to what the captain has stored away in the Cracker Pot cellar."

"Do you know why?" asked Connors.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Because I'm ashamed to tell you how little I know about it, and if I told you even that much you might not go down."

"And yet you ask me to assume this responsibility in your affairs without taking me into your confidence? You tell me that some of my money helped to transplant this so-called trouble from the French Congo to your establishment and refuse to acquaint me with any of the details. Now, how do I know but that a degree of criminal guilt will rest with me as the result of my folly in becoming a party to it?"

"Mr. Bruce," began Connors, "wasn't I square enough to poke my finger right into the speckled apple? Couldn't I have jumped this cargo business if I was a trimmer? Honest, would I dare ask you to come down if I thought you would get in trouble? Listen, Mr. Bruce, Captain Jake is crooked and I got you to put your money into his deal. Yes, I did, and I'm ashamed of it. I tell you I got to find him so I can break square with my friends; got to find him or the Cracker Pot will be riddled; got to find him in three days, so I can hold off this bunch of cutthroat sailors. Don't you see? The minute anything starts the police will close me up. Mr. Bruce, I needs

you now, I does. I needs you to watch a thieving bartender; needs you because you can fix it with the police if they show up before I get back. Captain Wallers would break a leg to help you, Mr. Bruce, and—honest—it's outside th' ropes for me, if—Listen, Mr. Bruce, you are the only white man I know and I asks you—trust me till I gets back from Boston."

The Rev. Bruce de Lisle was in a quandry. By all the sacred rights of gratitude this man was entitled to call upon him in his hour of dire necessity. This he knew. He was also aware of the folly of attempting to discuss the ethics of ministerial propriety with Connors, who considered that the Cracker Pot was respectability personified.

As he weighed the consequences of this temporary point of contact with the underworld he saw that it had certain advantages. Then again he realized that his consent was made easier by virtue of the fact that he had visited the place in his ministerial capacity. Had even expressed a desire to return at a later date.

"What do you think about it, Andrew?" he asked, turning to his friend.

"Well, do you acknowledge Connors's right to make this request?"

"I do," said he with all the solemnity of the marriage service.

"Can you square the job with your ministerial calling?"

"In view of the obligation—yes."

"All right—that settles it. I believe that Connors is telling the truth, and accept his reluctance to go into certain details—on honor. Stand by him, and if you want any help from me I'm with you."

As had been said before, Connors was a prizefighter, but even this species of the race is more or less human. That was undoubtedly why Connors wiped his emotional nose.

"Listen, Mr. Bruce. Listen, Fat—excuse me, Andy—I mean Mr. Bailey. I'm swallowing a lump as big as the City Hall clock. I am—and I don't know what kind of words to use, but God love you for this, gents."

Bailey arose and looked at his watch.

"When do you start for Boston?" he asked.

"The first train out," answered Connors.

"That will be with the newspapers. You have missed the midnight express. My proposal is this: take us down to this place of yours to-night so we can get the lay of things before you go. By the way, will we need a gun or anything like that?"

"Not unless you want to practice on Eddie Carbon's musical gong. Mr. Bailey, the Cracker Pot is as safe as a cradle."

"Who is Eddie Carbon?" asked Bruce.

"Eddie is a harmony king. He can play a pianner upside down, Eddie can, but I'm going to tell him to lay off on the concert work till I get back. Eddie won't bother you, and"—Connors hesitated—"don't pay any attention to him, gents; he's all right, but he don't talk much."

Bailey's suggestion to visit the Cracker Pot met with Bruce's approval, and Connors was anxious to draft some kind of note that would excuse his absence to his bartender without disclosing his destination. He also intended to incorporate within this note some allusion that would reveal Bruce's standing with Captain Wallers. This was to be written as soon as they reached the Cracker Pot. Within twenty minutes they were rolling southward in a night-hawk cab.

A dense fog was sweeping in from the East River as they stepped to the curb in front of the Cracker Pot. It was a soggy, mist-dripping fog, that cast huge halos of light around each street lamp and inked the shadows in every lane and alley. Now and then a mass of shadow would assume human form, then slip past into the darkness.

After admitting them, Connors locked the street door and handed the key to Bruce de Lisle.

"You may want it," he said. "There are two for this door. Emile has the other one."

Then Connors passed from the barroom into the ladies' parlor, where a dim light was burning; his companions waiting in the semidarkness of the dingy barroom.

Through the open doorway Bruce and Bailey saw him lift his hand to turn on the sickly looking jet of gas.

Just what happened they did not know, but as his fingers touched the gas cock the light went out.

Their first impression was that he had turned it the wrong way, and they momentarily expected the flash of a match. This conclusion was supported by the evidence, as there had been an exclamation of surprise from Connors and the sound of scraping feet against the bar floor. After that silence.

They waited. In all likelihood not over fifteen seconds had elapsed, but it seemed hours, then Bailey moved forward. He was in total darkness, but by throwing out his hands was able to determine his position. He was close to one of the door posts.

"Do you want a match, Connors?" he asked.

Not a sound came from the back room.

"Connors, what is it?" questioned Bruce, who now stood at Bailey's side, peering into the darkness.

Still no answer.

Both the clergyman and his friend realized the danger of their position; without firearms, light, or knowledge of their surroundings, and in one of the questionable resorts of the city.

"Stand back," said Bailey. "I'm going to light a match and find out what has happened. Safe as a cradle!" he muttered. "A cradle of rattlesnakes."

The flickering light of the burning match, shaded by his hands, was far more disquieting than the darkness had been, as it allowed imagination to people the dim recesses of the room. This, however, did not deter Bailey, who cautiously advanced until he stood directly underneath the burner they had seen Connors reach for. Then he realized that the man had not made an error of judgment in reaching for the light. It was flowing with the wicked hiss that accompanies the escape of unlighted gas. Bailey touched his match to the burner and a flood of light followed.

The room was empty.

With one accord they reached for the knob of the door which opened into the dance hall, assuming that Connors had stepped in there.

It was locked and they saw that the key was on their side of the door.

At the left of the room was a door which opened into the hallway that led to the

street. This was also locked and the key in evidence to proclaim the impossibility of Connors's disappearance in that direction.

Their wonder grew as it dawned upon them that there was not a window in the room.

The scant furnishings were next considered. There were three tables, six chairs and a refrigerator. The latter was about four feet wide, six in height, and perhaps two deep. It was packed with a general stock of saloon merchandise. Bailey opened the comparatively small refrigerator door, and a bottle slipped to the floor.

"It would have been a physical impossibility for him to have disappeared in this direction," said Bruce.

Finally they examined the floor—foot by foot. Not so much as a loose board was in evidence.

It seemed quite beyond belief that a man could disappear so quickly and silently.

"He must have passed you in the darkness," said Bruce.

"Never. I was too close to the door; but suppose we examine the barroom?"

The search proved to be a fruitless one.

"He must have slipped past us and made for the street through the front door," said Bailey.

"Impossible," replied Bruce. "I have the key in my pocket—Connors locked the door behind him the minute we stepped inside—he could not have disappeared by way of this front room."

"Listen, what's that?" exclaimed Bailey.

As they listened—in silence, straining to register the full significance of the shout that had startled them—they distinctly heard the call: "Bruce—Bailey—help—help!"

It was Connors's voice, outside in the street, and was followed by subdued mutterings and the sound of scuffling feet.

CHAPTER V.

A CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

EVEN a clergyman's fingers may function as thumbs under the stress of incidents so exciting, and precious time was lost as Bruce fumbled with the door.

The lock was ancient and the key was cumbersome.

Once it was opened they fairly tumbled out of the Cracker Pot, only to find that they were engulfed in a mass of drifting fog. The street lamps no longer battled for recognition, but had succumbed; they were mere negations of light value. In the confusion and uncertainty, Bailey grasped the arm of his friend.

"Don't move until we get our bearings," he whispered.

From some point within the blinding fog they caught the sound of heavy blows, rough oaths, and gruff voices.

"This way," said Bruce, starting diagonally across the street.

Not until they had reached the opposite curb did they discover that their direction was wrong. Then, through a rift, a momentary lifting or drawing of the moist curtain, they saw an indistinct blur that might have been a cab or carriage, and heard the muffled voices of men within it. Likewise, the bang of a closing door. After that the rumble of wheels over the cobbles and the galloping clank of iron-shod hoofs, growing fainter in the distance; moving on into the blackness of the night.

That was all.

Standing there in the drip and gloom Bailey took a cigar from his pocket and lighted it with exasperating coolness.

"Sorry you don't smoke, old man," said he. "Awfully comforting, you know, sometimes."

Bruce de Lisle did not attempt an immediate response. When he did there was a note of helplessness in his voice.

"What are we going to do?" he asked.

"Going to do!" exclaimed Bailey. "We are going to lock up this palace of mirth across the street and go home."

"Think you can sleep?" asked Bruce.

"Certainly—that's one of the compensations of being fat. Besides that, I have a trick brain. A delicate subcellar lobe, that will dig the lining out of any problem overnight. Come on—it's getting ready to agitate."

"That mind of yours will probably be of great value to us, Andy," said Bruce as they recrossed the street and entered the

Cracker Pot. "But there are a few fundamentals we ought to establish before banking on this accommodating lobe of gray matter."

"For instance?" questioned Bailey.

"To start with: was Connors kidnaped or did he disappear in accordance with some prearranged plan of his own?"

"Kidnaped—some one wanted him, and they got him. His call for help proves that. Furthermore, he came here with us, because we asked him to. It was his intention to go direct to the Grand Central Station and take the first express for Boston."

"That sounds fair enough," was Bruce's comment. "Do we want to spend any time on the question of who got him and what they want him for?"

"No; we do not. In my opinion, we should dismiss that for the present. The next three days may help us to solve that section of the problem. Just now we better stick to our known facts. We agree that he was kidnaped, and that it was his voice we heard calling for help. Also that he was spirited away in a cab."

"Correct."

"The mystifying part of it to me is this, granting that they got him out of the back room by some means unknown to us, how did they manage to reach the street?"

"I give it up," replied Bruce.

"And I admit that it is too deep for me," said Bailey. "I've had them pull coins out of my ears and ducks out of my silk hat, but I never supposed it was possible to whisk a man right out of a room while looking at him."

Further speculation being useless, they locked up the Cracker Pot and started for home with the understanding that Bailey was to take breakfast with Bruce in the morning.

Therefore at 8 A.M. they were seated in the dining room of the rectory for a brief discussion of their future plans. First of all, Bailey was to call upon Captain Wallers and relate the peculiar circumstances under which Bruce had become obligated to Connors and to inform him of the latter's strange request and Bruce's consent. They agreed that it would not be wise to mention Connors's mysterious disappearance, as it

would defeat the man's object in calling upon Bruce for assistance. The conference was short, as Sunday morning hardly seemed to be an appropriate time for Bruce to concentrate upon Connors's sordid affairs.

About an hour later Bailey delivered Bruce de Lisle's message to Captain Wallers, who seemed both pleased and amused at the loyalty of his clerical friend.

"Tell him not to worry," said he. "The chances are that the place will be as quiet as a Sunday school. This man Connors is as square as a business of that character will allow him to be, but sooner or later we will have to clean him out."

Bruce had agreed to meet Bailey at the Cracker Pot by ten o'clock on Monday morning, which gave him ample time to follow his usual custom of spending an hour in the gymnasium associated with the Parish House Community Service, where, to the consternation of the staid board of governors, he sometimes instructed the young men of his church in the "manly art."

Upon entering the Cracker Pot they found Emile industriously polishing sundry bottles and brasses behind the dingy bar. In front of it, a blear-eyed wreck was plying a short rake over the sawdust-covered floor. It was Joie the Jug.

"I am a friend of Connors," said Bruce to Emile by way of introduction.

"Yes, sir," was Emile's response.

"He's gone away for a few days," continued Bruce, scrutinizing the man's face for the purpose of trying to discover how much he knew concerning the sudden departure of his employer.

One of Emile's tricks was to assume the mask of dull stupidity when in doubt, and this he now attempted, but there had been one fractional moment of uncertainty, and in that brief space Bruce noted the glint of satisfaction in Emile's eye.

"I am here with the knowledge and consent of Captain Wallers," he added, "and in a general way will look after the business during his absence."

"Yes, sir."

This terminated the verbal preliminaries between them. Each had taken his measure of the other.

Directly after this Bailey left, after agree-

ing to return late in the afternoon, and Bruce seated himself at one of the little tables, where he spread out certain papers he had brought with him, but work was out of the question—the atmosphere was all wrong.

The first thing to divert his attention was the negro. Eddie Carbon was uneasy. His black face reflected a weight of responsibility. A dozen times he disappeared through the trapdoor behind the platform, which was not twelve feet from the table at which Bruce was seated. It was the shrill, tremulous note of a female voice that brought him to his feet. There was no mistaking the sound, or from whence it came. Carbon had just closed the door over his head as he descended the ladder, or steps, leading to the mysterious chamber below.

The quavering notes of anger, or fear—Bruce knew not which—had scarcely died out when he stood over the small trapdoor. A great revulsion of feeling was sweeping over him. Alert, tense, and with tread as soft as that of a stalking tiger, he encircled the rough-planked door, waiting for—he scarcely knew not what.

Chinks of light could be seen through the cracks and crevices. He bent over to lift the door, and as he did so heard the soft crooning tones that only a negro can express.

Bruce hesitated. Three things restrained him. First the doubt that he had heard aright. After all, it might have been the negro. Second, the wisdom of inviting a disastrous conclusion to any adventure that might be sure of success with Bailey's assistance. A thought which was far from being an idle one, as Emile was watching every movement he made. His last restraining thought was based on his promise to Connors—a promise from which he was undoubtedly absolved by the strange disappearance of the man who had exacted it, but nevertheless a promise.

Standing there, uncertain, but active of mind, he distinctly heard that which startled him. It was the snapping of teeth, accompanied by a growl; a deep-rumbling snarl, more animal than human.

If an opportunity had been given to Bruce to lance the fast-ripening Cracker

Pot mystery, he had missed it, as Emile was advancing to the platform, with Joie acting as a rear guard. But the campaign had evidently been mapped as a strategic one. It was for the purpose of drawing Bruce from the danger zone, as was shown by the pail and mop which Joie carried.

"We always cleans up in here on Mondays," said Emile. "You'll have to move."

Perhaps it was a full appreciation of the responsibility, associated with the part he was to play, that caused Joie to bungle his act. At any rate, his clumsy efforts met with disaster. Bruce was supposed to retreat under the menace of Joie's industrious mop, and this was what he did. Hence, the splendid confidence of Joie, as shown by the swirling strokes of his mop, one of which overturned his pail.

A torrent of black billingsgate slipped from Emile's glib tongue. It was lurid.

Bruce clenched his hands until the nails bit into his palms, but the outburst meant nothing to Joie, except to add to his confusion. This it did and to the point of confusion confounded, for he again lost the ability to measure distances accurately, and brought his wet mop against Emile's immaculate white apron.

With an oath the bartender wrenches the mop from his hands, and the next instant had struck the unoffending weakling a blow that broke full across his forehead—as brutal as it was unnecessary.

Bruce de Lisle never hesitated for a minute. There was one quick stride; one delightful right-arm swing, and one beautiful smash between Emile's eyes.

Emile's first imitation was that of a windmill. He was on his way, and his arms were wildly thrashing the air. About the time he was ready to land among a pile of chairs at the side of the hall he doubled up, jackknife fashion. All of which was quite appropriate in view of the splintered kindlings his fall produced.

"You miserable skunk!" was the highly improper clerical epithet used by Bruce as he stood over Emile.

Dazed, but disillusioned, Emile rested among the splintered legs and rungs of the Cracker Pot chairs. The ethics of the thing was all quite new to him; quite anticlerical,

and irregular, but certain primitive instincts had always prevailed so far as the law of self-preservation was concerned, and he knew when he had enough.

"All right, if you say so. Lemme up. I'm through."

Without offering to assist him to his feet Bruce waited until the subdued bartender had disentangled himself and was standing before him. Then he indulged in another highly unprofessional remark. "Beat it," he exclaimed. "Quick!"

Without a word Emile limped back to his official headquarters with a clearer vision of the full scope and magnitude of the ministerial calling.

Then Bruce applied himself to the dressing of Joie's lacerated forehead—a service which was amply repaid by the gratitude of his patient—a dumb, animal-like response that was pathetic, and although Bruce was not aware of it, his kindly act was destined to arouse the lethargic Joie to some show of appreciation before the night was over.

The morning hours passed all too slow for Bruce. Time had become a laggard. The afternoon proved to be equally as dull and commonplace, but six o'clock did eventually come, and Bruce hurried out to supper.

It was eight thirty when he returned, to find that Bailey had not put in an appearance. There were but a few people in the Cracker Pot at that hour, but shortly after nine o'clock several women entered, and their easy familiarity indicated that they were regular habitués of the establishment.

Following them came a young woman whose appearance riveted Bruce's attention. Her swaggering boldness attracted him first; the rakish tilt of her sailor hat; the short, blue jacket, with its snappy pockets, wherein she had thrust her hands with sufficient energy to crack the seams.

He thought that he had never seen any specimen of young womanhood quite so hard; so utterly void of the conventional feminine graces. The very swing of her skirt as she walked to one of the empty tables was aggressive and defiant.

As Bruce scrutinized her face for the tell-tale lines of degeneration he believed would be in evidence he was surprised to note a

profile that suggested the opposite of those things which are base and low. He saw the quick emotional play of a sensitive mouth and wondered if it was possible that she had deliberately chosen the companionship of those about her.

Then he noted the deftly bound coil of hair that was tucked under the broad-brimmed hat. It was brown, like the russet tones of autumn.

She was evidently conscious of his masculine appraisement and seemed to be anxious to avoid any possible acknowledgment of it that would signal her approval. In fact, she evinced a degree of embarrassment quite foreign to Cracker Pot society.

Was it real or feigned? Bruce did not know.

While attempting to solve the problem something occurred which caused him to speculate anew.

Eddie Carbon had once more emerged from what Bruce now designated the "Chamber of Horrors."

Instantly the young woman's attitude changed. She was no longer playing a part. The negro's appearance was a revelation to her, or it might have been that he stood for a confirmation of her fears—possibly her expectations. With evidence of suppressed excitement she leaned forward and watched him from the moment of his appearance until he disappeared through the street door. Her face was registering the keenest satisfaction.

Bruce had begun to suspect that he was involved in a situation far more complex than he imagined. Up to the moment his interest in the Cracker Pot mystery had been passive. He had been content to wait developments. He had reasoned that, no matter what might occur, it was Connors's problem, and all of the characters involved belonged to the underworld, but here was something new—some evidence of interest in Connors's affairs by one who reflected both culture and refinement, try as she might to disguise it.

He arose and walked toward the table at which she sat, but did so without any definite idea of what he intended to say after his arrival.

As his hand was on the chair at her side

she turned a questioning face toward him, and the next instant both were startled by the violence with which the street door had been opened. It was Bailey, and his speed increased as he rushed through the little back parlor into the hall, where he quickly dragged Bruce to one side.

"We are in for it, old man," he whispered. "Thank Heaven, I arrived in time. There is the blackest crew of cutthroats outside that could be gathered in seven States. Twenty or more. Drive out these women."

Then, even in all his excitement, Bailey could not refrain from the light, facetious remark, and with a broad grin: "By the way, who's your little friend?"

If Bruce heard the question he ignored it. The danger of their situation was evident. The voice of the mob was becoming more and more insistent. They were near the Cracker Pot entrance; in fact, the door was seen to tremble under the impact of numbers; rough-voiced men, who were only

waiting for the signal to enter. Through the window, above the green shade, their surging forms could be seen; a seething mass of frenzied humanity.

At this critical moment Bruce found that his mind had tuned to its highest efficiency. Like a flash the situation dawned upon him. Some master-hand was directing all of the seemingly disconnected events that had transpired. Captain Jake's Boston trip was a bit of fiction for the purpose of removing Connors, so that this raid might be carried out during his absence. True, they did not know that Connors had surrendered to the deception, and that was why they had become impatient, and forcibly removed him.

One thing was certain. Bruce would soon know what they were trying to defend. The value of Jake's cargo was about to be revealed.

The door of the Cracker Pot was opened with a crash and the frenzied horde rushed inside!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



GEMS OF CONSOLATION

THE memory of a kindly word
In days gone by,
The fragrance of a faded flower
Sent lovingly,
The gleaming of a sudden smile
Or sudden tear,
The warmer pressure of the hand,
The tone of cheer,
The hush that means "I cannot speak,
But I have heard!"
The message of a single verse
From God's own Word:
Such tiny things we hardly count
As ministry;
The givers deeming they have shown
Scant sympathy;
But when the heart is overwrought,
Oh, who can tell
The power of all such tiny things
To make it well?



The Storm Woman

By JOHN HOLDEN

Author of "Four Strokes at Midnight," "Beyond Control," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

WHEN the stranger alighted from the stage Sheriff Jim Harper's first feeling was one of surprise that such an obviously refined and educated girl should wish to stop at the wild railroad construction town for even a single day. Storekeeper Joe Blundell had just been telling him that he had felt obliged to send his wife and daughters to Helena to live because of Geyser's swift retrogression from a respectable dry farmers' trading point to a hell of iniquity since work on the B. and N. cut-off had begun. When the girl inquired if there was a small vacant building for rent Harper received a mental jolt, such as a lover of jewelry might experience at sight of a pearl necklace dropping into a gutter.

"There is, but I hardly think you will want it," Blundell told her.

"Why not?"

Harper noted that her tone betokened de-

termination as well as culture. Her very attractive eyes seemed unusually somber and serious, and there was a trace of anxiety in her fine features. Her tailored suit was as businesslike as it was well-fitting.

"Well, you see—" Blundell looked embarrassed. "This town, miss—it isn't the kind of burg you probably think it is—not the sort of place it used to be by a long shot. It's tough, miss. So tough that I had to send the missis and girls away till the railroaders get out. All those buildings you see down there"—he waved his hand—"are just saloons and low dance halls and—all that sort of thing."

"I think I understand. Is the vacant building situated near those places?"

"Yes—that's why I don't think you want it."

The girl smiled in a mysterious manner that increased Sheriff Harper's interest in her.

"On the contrary that is a point in its favor. May I see the place? Are you the agent?"

"I am, miss; and you may." Blundell noted a possible customer weaving his way storeward and turned to Harper.

"You show her the shack, Jim. You're not busy."

"Sure," said the sheriff. "Come along, miss."

"Miss Juno," said the girl. "Since I am going to become a resident of your interesting little town, I suppose you'll have to learn my name sooner or later."

Harper removed his huge sombrero in a courtly manner as he, in turn, told her his name, but not his business.

Courtliness was inherent in Geyser's sheriff. Even to the poor drabs who infested the lowest dance hall, his manner was Chesterfieldian. In other ways also he differed from the ordinary run of Geyser men. His strong features were always clean-shaven, his heavy blond hair was combed and brushed, his boots were shined, the hands that could whip out six-guns or bind an injured dog's leg with equal facility were as clean and muscularly sensitive as those of a master pianist.

"Are you going into business, Miss Juno?" he queried as they proceeded toward the cluster of rough and unpainted structures that had given Geyser its present evil name.

"Yes," said the girl shortly, as though her attention were too much engrossed with the sights about her to permit of conversation.

In truth, these sights were sufficient to claim the attention of even a woman hardened to life in a railroad camp during that lawless period in Montana's history.

On both sides of a dusty thoroughfare that did not even boast a sidewalk, a number of hastily carpentered structures stuck up like sore fingers, rough-boarded, unpainted, unspeakably crude and garish in the glare of broad daylight. The camp was quiescent now. Here and there a besotted individual snored in the sunshine, his back against one of the buildings, his head on his chest. Occasionally a dance hall denizen kimono-clad and looking ghastly with-

out her make-up, flitted from one den to another. Heaps of tin cans and litters of rubbish offended the eye at every turn.

With the coming of night, things would be different. Darkness would hide the ugliness; lights would blaze; hard-faced harpies would again resemble real women. Raucous laughter would mingle with the blare of musical instruments, roulette balls would whir and click, dancing feet would scrunch the floor, money would jingle on the long counter of the Lone Star Saloon and Dance Hall. The proprietor, Dan Sherrard, would smile in his usual oily manner and pour ingratiating phrases of false fellowship into the ears of poor fools from the camps.

Harper did not fail to observe that Miss Juno shuddered and her lips tightened and looked hard and determined as she neared the vacant shack opposite the Lone Star.

"That's the place," he said. "If you want an observation post for a close view of hell, I can recommend it highly."

She glanced through a dusty window into the bare interior, and before Harper had even opened the door she answered: "It's just what I'm looking for."

She examined the inside of the little cabin and again smiled with satisfaction. Harper looked at her more closely than before. His curiosity was increasing.

"You wish to live here?" he queried.

"Live here and work here, too," the strange girl answered.

"Conduct a little store of some sort, maybe?"

"No; not a store."

They left the place and headed back toward Blundell's.

One of the dance hall women shuffled around a corner and almost ran into them. Miss Juno shrank back and clutched Harper's arm in an involuntary gesture of repulsion.

"What a horrible creature!" she exclaimed.

The woman glared and passed on, and the girl quickly let go of Harper's arm as she realized what she was doing.

In the mind of an ordinary man the incident would have banished any atom of doubt that Miss Juno's proposed business might be open to question. The girl was

too plainly disgusted with the evidences of iniquity on every side. In Harper's mind it banished no atom of doubt, for the simple reason that he had never entertained any.

"If you're not going to open a store, maybe it's an office to sell stock or something," he ventured.

"No," came the quick answer.

"You're going to start some sort of clean and innocent amusement?"

"The shack isn't big enough for anything like that."

"Well, then, you're a missionary of some sort, even though you don't look it."

Miss Juno slowly shook her head.

"My mission here," she stated, "is to make money."

Her replies to his queries were mystifying. Harper said nothing for a while.

"I don't wish to appear curious—" he began haltingly.

The girl cut in with a rippling little laugh that was as musical as the tinkle of a flower-bordered brook: "I've noticed that."

He felt foolish.

"You've got me there, Miss Juno," he admitted. "I *am* curious. I *would* like to know your business in this hell hole. In a way, it's my duty to learn it. Living alone in that shack, directly opposite the largest and worst of all the dives, you will be in danger, and it will be my job to protect you."

The girl whirled upon him.

"Who are you, that you should talk about protecting a woman you don't know?"

"I am the sheriff of Carson County."

In the silence that followed this announcement Harper could hear Miss Juno's sharp intake of breath. She was staring at him. He thought that she paled and looked alarmed, but before he could make sure of it she regained her poise with a laugh.

"That being the case, I take it all back," she said. "Nevertheless, I don't need your protection. As for disclosing my business here, this will tell you all that I wish to let anybody know for the present."

She handed Harper a printed circular, and he read it slowly and wonderingly.

It stated that on the following Saturday night at 8 P.M., Miss Alice Juno would open

an office and, in a speech from her door, would announce her business in Geyser. So far as she knew, no similar business had ever been started at any railroad grading camp before. She expected to render a service to the railroad workers, and she hoped to merit their patronage. At the bottom was a blank line on which the location of her office would be filled in with a pencil.

"I got those prepared in advance: I intend to have them distributed at all the near-by camps," she stated.

"Good idea," approved Harper. "Curiosity will bring you a crowd, all right—that and your location opposite the Lone Star."

He expressed his willingness to do anything he could for her, but she declined his offer with thanks, and during the remainder of the day, and the days that followed, she proceeded to carry out her plan, whatever it was, with energy and efficiency.

Harper made no further effort to pry into her affairs, but he could not help noticing that she engaged the livery stable to cart a sizable trunk and a typewriter, as well as a cot, table, and some household utensils, to her new dwelling. The typewriter was the only clew in sight to indicate her proposed enterprise, and it was a poor clew. Writing machines are used in almost every line of business. Even Sherrard, the Lone Star proprietor, possessed one.

In her office Alice Juno worked behind drawn shades and kept her doors locked. Her handbills were distributed, and the men got to talking about her. Curiosity mounted and indications were that quite a gathering would be in front of her office on Saturday night. Incidentally, Saturday was the last day of the month and therefore pay day.

But no one's curiosity was quite so great as that of Sheriff Jim Harper.

II.

ALICE JUNO's artful arousing of public curiosity did its work. Long before eight o'clock on Saturday night men began to gather in front of her office to guess at the nature of her speech.

Under-sized mule skinners from the grading machine camps were there in their dirty,

sweat-stained clothes; intelligent looking engineers and cranesmen from the steam-shovel cuts, well-dressed and clean-shaven; muckers and dump men slouching around with the mud and grime of their occupation still upon them; timekeepers and clerks in sport shirts and riding breeches; cooks and flunkies, stablemen and blacksmiths—all the different workers from all the different camps within fifteen miles or more. As the hour for the unknown girl's speech arrived they milled around in front of her door like baseball enthusiasts before a score-board.

From the door of the Lone Star Saloon, across the street, Sheriff Jim Harper watched the proceedings. He tried to appear nonchalant and unconcerned, but really he was on pins and needles of expectation. Alice Juno interested him immensely. He admired her and he respected her. He wondered how many of the men in the street possessed the nerve to do what that frail girl was doing—start a new business in a hell hole like Geyser and make a speech to a crowd such as that. Her object, he reasoned, must be stronger than the commonplace one of earning a living.

The saloon was practically empty. Even the women habitués, wide awake now and more or less resplendent in powder, paint, and tawdry finery, were outside awaiting the unknown girl's speech. The proprietor, Dan Sherrard, joined Harper at the door and gazed across the street with no excess of good will.

"Hits your business quite a wallop, eh, Sherrard?" Harper queried.

"Only for the moment." Sherrard's tone was contemptuous. "She'll say her little say-so, whatever it is, and then they'll come piling in here."

Promptly at eight o'clock the door of the mysterious shack flung open and Alice Juno stepped to the front of a tiny platform in a manner so sudden and dramatic that the crowd's attention was caught immediately.

"Friends," she began without an instant's hesitation, "all of you want to write lots of letters to friends and relatives back home. But you don't do it. You write only a few or none at all. Why? Because conditions in the camps are against it. There are no

desks to write on, there is too much noise to think, you are tired after a hard day's work, your fingers don't handle a pen readily, and chances are there is no pen to handle. If there is, the ink is missing, or there's no note paper or envelopes or stamps or something else. You keep putting off the job until finally it's been put off so long that you're ashamed to write.

"Naturally, if you don't send letters you don't get any, and then you think that no one cares about you. You are wrong, my friends. No matter who or what you are, no matter how alone and friendless you may think you are, there is some one who cares more for you than for any one else on God's green earth! I want you to write to that person, whoever it is, and to all your other friends as well, and it is in order to make writing easy for you that I have set up in business here. I am a professional stenographer and typist, and I want you to write your letters through me."

She paused, and Harper overheard comments:

"Good idea, that."

"She sure said a mouthful."

Alice continued:

"Perhaps the person who is longing to hear from you is a brother or a sister, a husband or wife, a father or a mother. A mother! Do you hear that? I wonder how many of you have mothers to whom you have not written in weeks or months or years? If you have, don't you know that she wants to hear from you? You do know it. Then why not write?"

"If you have prospered no one will be so glad to hear it as your mother. If you haven't—if you have gone down and down until perhaps you are even living a life of shame and disgrace—she still wants to hear from you. If you are ashamed to tell the truth about yourself—don't! Tell lies, tell anything, just so she will know you are alive. If you can't think of anything to say, I can and will. Don't you realize that even one short line from the child she brought into the world may mean all the difference to a mother between dreary days of melancholy and hopeful weeks of happiness?"

In front of Harper and Sherrard, one of

the tawdry women wheeled suddenly and stumbled into the dance hall, handkerchief to her eyes, sobbing hysterically.

"Mother! Oh, Gawd, I can't stand that!" She pitched into a chair, head buried in her arms, her bare shoulders heaving convulsively.

Sherrard jerked her to her feet. "Shut your trap, Babe, an' get t' hell outa here!" He gave her a shove toward the rear.

Harper joined the crowd. Another dance hall woman was sniffling. A great hairy brute of a man pulled a red handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose loudly, as men will when emotion clutches them. Even Harper, the hardened man-hunter, who wrote his mother as regularly as the stage traveled, felt a lump rise up in his throat as the sad-eyed girl in front continued to utter one homely truism after another. Her conquest of her audience was as full and complete as though she were the greatest orator in America.

"As I said, I didn't come here to lecture on love, but to make money," Alice went on. "So here's my proposition: Write your letters through me. No bother, no fuss with ink, pens, and paper. Sit down beside my desk and talk as though your loved one were beside you, easy and naturally, and every word that you utter will be typewritten by me just as fast as you speak it. When you have finished, sign your name at the bottom, and the deed is done. I'll attend to the mailing; I'll furnish envelopes and postage. That is my proposition, folks; a plain business offer. Fifty cents a page, double-spaced, is my charge—worth five hundred dollars, maybe, to the one who receives it. That's all I've got to say. Operations begin right now; first come, first served; line forms on the right. All ready? Let's go!"

There was an outburst of applause as, with a smile, she backed into her tiny office and seated herself at her typewriter.

A man near the door entered and took the chair beside her desk. A line quickly formed. Harper did not join it, but he stepped to the office door to obtain a better view.

The first correspondent was gazing at the ceiling and speaking as though the per-

son he was addressing was in the room. His tongue clattered along at a rapid rate, but not too rapid for the operator, who recorded it direct on the machine with a degree of speed that stamped her an expert. The man wound up in a flurry of words, accompanied by a grandiloquent waving of his hands, one of which just missed the typist's cheek, and then he slowly read his literary effort.

"Holy mackerel!" he exclaimed. "Who'd a' thought letter-writing is as easy as that?" He signed his name and paid his money, throwing in an extra half dollar for a tip, then made way for the next in line.

Harper moved back into the crowd of spectators who were not awaiting their turn and stood there, as pleased as a baseball fan whose team has won the world's series. He overheard various comments:

"Great stuff!"

"She ought to make money at it."

"I'll say the girl has nerve."

"Just the same, she'd better watch out or Sherrard will get her."

The last remark prompted Harper to step across to the dance hall and take a look inside. Only a few patrons were in the place. Sherrard's scowl was an inch deep. Harper left and resumed his observations outside.

Suddenly a crash sounded in the letter-writer's office and a shriek that was instantly muffled was heard above the blare of the Lone Star music. It motivated Jim Harper as an electric flash sets off dynamite. Like a wild elephant he tore through the crowd, hurling men aside in his mad progress, fighting, plunging, until he reached the place.

Alice was gazing, wild-eyed, at her typewriter, which lay on the floor. Half a dozen men were holding a rat-faced individual who protested loudly that he had not meant to tip over the little table on which the machine had rested. Harper recognized him as a porter in Sherrard's employ.

He set the machine back on the table and noted that, while it was out of commission for the evening, it was not broken beyond hope of local repair.

"Never mind; we'll get another," he said to Alice; then to the crowd:

"Don't go away. Business as usual in a minute."

He interrogated the porter and spectators sharply, but no proof that the toppling of the typewriter on the floor was other than an accident was forthcoming, so he released the fellow.

He crossed the street to the Lone Star and accosted the proprietor.

"Sherrard," he said, "you've got a typewriter that you're not using at present. I'd like to borrow it for Miss Juno."

The dance hall man sneered. "That's nerve for you," he said. "That cursed girl has ruined my business for the night. A lot of those idiots who fell for her mush are sending money away that would be spent here. And yet when she meets with an accident you want me to assist in my own ruin by loaning her my typewriter."

Harper bored Sherrard with eyes that were like points of steel.

"Right away, please!" The words cracked like a whiplash. "I'll return it tomorrow."

Sherrard consented then, and the sheriff carried the borrowed typewriter across to the new office, where Alice Juno was writing meanwhile with a pen. He stated that he would be around next day to repair her broken machine.

III.

WITH a few simple tools, Harper performed his task the following morning, then sat down for a chat with the most interesting young woman he had ever met.

Alice Juno was very charming on this occasion. Success in her business venture has chased some of the wistful sadness from her eyes, but she was still a bit more sober and serious than any woman in her early twenties ought to be.

"Do you know, I'm still puzzled about you," Harper told her. "I don't know what to make of you."

"Why make anything?"

"Because I think you are in trouble of some sort and I want to help you."

"I have not asked for help."

Proud young women rarely do seek it.

In the first place," Harper went on, "I cannot bring myself to believe that you are here simply to make money."

"I like to think that I will bring a bit of happiness into this sad world also."

"Yes—but there is more to you than that. You made a lot of money last night and you created a lot of happiness, but still you are troubled and unhappy. I think, Miss Juno, that you are here for some mysterious reason that you are unwilling to disclose."

Alice rose and gazed out of her open door, then turned and replied:

"You seem concerned. Why?"

"I am afraid that something will happen to you. You are too pretty a woman to be alone in a place like Geyser."

"I can take care of myself."

Harper had also risen.

"My dear Miss Juno," he said very earnestly, "up on the hillside back of this town there is a bleak and desolate patch of ground, with little mounds lying side by side, and at the head of each mound there is a plain piece of board penciled with the name of a person who thought he was capable of taking care of himself. Already you have made a vicious and powerful enemy here. I cannot prove that Dan Sherrard was back of the accident to your typewriter last night, but—"

He stopped, surprised by the girl's quick change of expression. Seeing that he noticed her emotion, she turned quickly away, then faced Harper again with the best imitation of a smile that she could muster.

"That graveyard—it must be interesting—I'd rather like to see it," she said with pseudo nonchalance.

"Of course. Why not go up with me now? You'll not get much business this morning."

"I will."

She locked her office and they sauntered to the foot of a sun-baked butte where, inside a fenced inclosure, six or seven ugly mounds of raw earth uplifted themselves. The girl proceeded directly to the board at the head of the first one and read the fast-fading name that had been rudely penciled thereon.

In turn she looked at each of the other

boards. Harper thought that she seemed relieved as she turned away from the last one and remarked that she ought to be getting back.

"I guess the reason I have taken such an interest in you is that I myself was an odd bird when I hit this country," he explained. "You may find it hard to believe, but I'm an Easterner, just as you are. Somehow, I didn't seem able to fit into the ordered life of the country town where I was born. Too slow for me. I had to have excitement and I got it in ways that were disapproved of. When folks began to refer to me as a black sheep, I figured it was time to light out, so I lit."

"Are you inferring that I am an odd bird?" One of her rare smiles lighted up Alice's fair features.

"You are mysterious, and that is odd. You are beautiful, and that is an attribute of most birds."

Her smile was wiped off like chalk marks on a blackboard. "I must ask you not to speak in that manner, Mr. Harper."

"Then how about *this* manner." Harper did not look like a man-hunter now; a very tender expression was in his winning eyes. "I love you, Alice, and I want you to marry me. That may seem sudden, but it is the truth. I want to shoulder your burden, whatever it may be. I want you to be happy. I am not a black sheep, really. I would be very good to you, Alice."

She looked at him in a sad and wistful manner. "I—I appreciate your offer, Mr. Harper, but it—it is impossible. Please do not ever mention such a thing again."

Harper had expected some such reply. It fitted in with everything that she said and did. "Isn't there *anything* I can do to help you?" he queried gently.

"Yes—let me manage my own life in my own way."

On their way back they called at the post office and Alice opened a bundle she had just received from a printer in Helena. She showed Harper a new circular which stated her business and appealed to the men to write letters to their friends and relatives, and she remarked that she meant to have them distributed along the whole line of construction.

Inadvertently she showed him something else. She laid what appeared to be a personal letter on top of her package, and Harper noted, without any intention of spying on her, that the postmark read, "Willowfield, Ohio."

The name impressed him. Willowfield! That might have been the name of his own native village, with its huge willow trees weeping over the fields and meadows in which he had played as a boy.

Probably that was where Alice came from. She had impressed him from the first as being a small town girl, and now, as he appraised her again, he felt sure that she was. Small town girls do not start typing offices in rough Western railroad camps, of course, but on the other hand, big city girls do not, either.

At her office there was no business in sight, so Harper proposed that they should visit his. She might be able to give him some hints on how to keep it in order, he said. She consented with a reluctance that vanished when she noted the "Man Wanted" circulars that were pinned up in a long line on his wall.

"What are those?" she queried.

Alert for any sign that would throw light on the mystery of her appearance in Geyser, Harper noted her sudden interest, just as he had previously noted her interest in the graveyard.

"Just reward circulars," he explained. "When a criminal escapes anywhere, the police send them out broadcast."

She was looking at the pictures and reading the descriptions underneath—methodically, one by one, just as she had read the inscriptions in the cemetery.

"If one of these men shows up in Geyser, you will arrest him, I presume?"

"I sure will."

"And pocket the reward?"

"That's one of a sheriff's perquisites."

"Do you catch many of these wanted men?"

"I'm sorry to say that I don't."

"But you keep a keen lookout for them?"

"Each and every one."

Harper thought that she was talking in a casual manner in order to conceal an interest that was considerably more than casual.

"You seem interested in the notices," he remarked.

"I am," Alice replied. "I like to look at a man's picture and guess at the crime he committed, then read the circular to see if I am right. You don't mind if I look at all of them, do you?"

"Not in the least."

She finished her inspection with what Harper could have sworn was an indication of relief, the same sort of relief she had shown after going through the graveyard.

"Do you receive new notices often?" she queried.

"Every few days."

"May I drop in again to look at any new ones you may have?"

Harper was only to glad to have Alice drop in, and said so. He accompanied her back to her office, then returned to his own, and again set himself to the task of solving the mystery of her appearance in Geyser. He knew there was such a mystery quite as well as he knew that Alice was in danger. No woman was safe in Geyser, least of all a pretty one who had antagonized the forces of evil.

Her interest in the grave boards and reward notices was singular. Could it have any bearing on her reason for being in this town? Was he right in thinking she had shown relief after scanning all the different names? He was almost sure that he was.

Then there was the matter of her appeal to the workers in general to remember their friends and relatives back home. Her business was certainly an odd one.

Like a flash of inspiration, a possible explanation of all her odd actions came to Harper. Some relative or friend had disappeared, she suspected that he was working on the railroad, and she wished to get in touch with him!

IV.

THE more Harper pondered his hypothesis the more reasonable did it appear. Alice figured that her name and mission would spread to every camp on the far-flung line of construction, and in that way the man she wished to reach would know she was in the country. Her appeal to the men in general to communicate with their

loved ones was really a plea to some one man to communicate with her. He wondered what relation this hypothetical man would be to her. Probably a lover or her husband; since she had given him to understand when he proposed marriage, that her affection was already engaged. Harper winced a little at the thought, but there was no getting away from it.

She had examined the grave board notices to see if the name of the man she sought was there and was relieved when it wasn't. She had scrutinized his reward notices, and had asked to see any future ones he might receive, for the same reason. She was seeking a man and was leaving no stone unturned to find him. This was the only reasonable explanation of her presence in Geyser that Harper could think of.

A few days later he went to the post office as usual and returned with some letters. In his office he opened them one by one. The first contained a Man Wanted circular. He read it in his usual manner and studied the picture of the wanted individual in an effort to recollect if he had ever seen the person. He had not, so he pinned it on his wall beside the others. He opened and read two other letters, and as he opened the last one he saw that it, too, contained a Man Wanted notice.

He looked at the picture first and noted that the wanted man, one Rodney Allan, was rather a handsome fellow, well dressed, evidently an office worker of some sort. Nothing unusual about that. Harper started to read the description, and glancing out of the window as he did so, he noted that Alice Juno was coming toward his office. He read hurriedly because he wanted to get it pinned up before she arrived. The man was wanted for embezzlement committed in the town of—

Jim Harper gasped as he read the name Willowfield, Ohio. The place that Alice came from. In a flash of understanding the whole thing became clear to him. This was the man she sought—Rodney Allan, who was wanted for embezzlement. No wonder she wished to see every new one that was received.

Harper's big hand clenched and his usual kindly expression was replaced by one that

was not so good to look upon. He glanced out of the window again. Alice was coming along in her usual demure and innocent-looking manner.

Innocent! Demure! He laughed harshly and cynically. That was a woman for you. An angel on the surface, with her soul-stirring and tear-provoking appeals to the men to write to their mothers, while, under the surface, her real purpose was to get in touch with a criminal so she could assist him to escape the penalty of his crime.

Harper slammed the reward notice down on his desk. A pretty fool he had made of himself. That was the woman he had fallen idiotically in love with; whom he had asked to marry him! And the only use she had for him was to learn if he was looking for Rodney Allan, so she could warn the latter to keep away from Geyser!

Her knock sounded on his door. He turned the Allan notice over on his desk and placed a paperweight on it.

"Come in," he said, and she entered.

She was not so demure now as she had been, in fact she was furiously angry.

"That beast, Sherrard!" she cried. "What do you think he did?"

"I've no idea. What?" Harper's tone was cold; but he concealed his feelings.

"Made me an offer to give up my business and become a singer and dancer in his resort. Five hundred dollars cash he offered if I'd close up my shop, and a hundred a week salary if I'd work for him. The brute!"

Harper reflected bitterly that only a few moments before he would have been taken in by such talk as that, would have become as indignant as she apparently was. But things were different now.

"Well?" he queried. "What was wrong with his offer? Sounds generous to me."

Alice took a step backward and stared at him.

"Why, Mr. Harper!"

There was a catch in her voice that was almost a sob. It had no effect on the sheriff.

"You can sing and dance, can't you?" he queried. "And act too, maybe?"

She sat down heavily in the chair beside his desk and continued to stare at him.

"I—er—thought you might have got some new notices," she quavered weakly. "That—that's why I dropped in."

Her right hand was on his desk, within six inches of where the Allan circular lay, back upward, under the paperweight. Her nervous fingers fidgeted closer and closer to it.

"I just pinned up a new notice," Harper told her. "Down there on the end—see?"

She rose and looked at it.

"That man doesn't look like a bad man," she remarked as she returned to his desk.

"Lots of criminals don't," Harper stated.

"Do you think that all these wanted men are criminals?" she asked.

"Why else would they be wanted?"

"You are very cynical to-day." Again Alice was seated at his desk, her fingers only a few inches from the overturned Allan notice. Harper wondered what would happen if he showed it to her. "Can't you imagine that an innocent man might be wanted?" she queried.

"Innocent men don't run away," Harper replied.

Alice sprang up.

"They do!" she cried. "If they can't establish their innocence, the only sensible thing to do is to run away. Oh, you are hard, hard, Jim Harper! You have no heart; you don't understand; you take it for granted that every man is guilty until he is proved innocent!"

Harper was on his feet too. He gave Alice another keen, penetrating look. No, she was not acting now. A new thought came to him. What if she believed that the man she sought — Rodney Allan, of course — was innocent of the crime he was wanted for? His tone was not quite so cold as he replied:

"I am a sheriff, Alice. My job is to catch wanted men; not judge if they are guilty or innocent."

She regained the casual demeanor that usually marked her visits.

"Of course," she said. "Good day, Mr. Harper."

"Good day," replied the sheriff.

He watched her as she walked back along

the stretch of roadway that separated her office from his; then he turned to the Allan notice again.

"Innocent or guilty, Allan," he said, addressing the picture on the circular, "my job is to arrest you if you show up around here, no matter how hard it will be on the little girl." He reflected for a moment, then put the notice in his inside pocket. "Guess I'll keep this out of her sight so she'll not learn that I want you and warn you to keep away from here," he added.

V.

HARPER was glad that he had formed the habit of keeping an eye on Alice Juno's office, because, now that his duty compelled him to watch for the appearance of Rodney Allan, he could do so without exciting suspicion. Her business was never very brisk during the day, and it was then that Harper attended to his other official duties.

With the coming of evening, however, men from the camps thronged her place, and then Harper made it his business to scrutinize each and every one of them. He carried the pictures and descriptions of all the wanted men in his mind, but it was Rodney Allan that he particularly watched for. The chance that any of the others were working on the railroad was small, but Alice must have reason to believe that Allan was in this district, otherwise she would not have located in Geyser.

During most of the evening, Harper sat on a chair in front of the Lone Star, from which he could obtain a pretty good view of the typing office. Occasionally he strolled past it, and at other times he kept a watch on the post office.

On every hand he heard complimentary remarks regarding Alice's efficient service. At the post office, Joe Blundell informed him that his sale of money orders had doubled.

"Fine for the relatives back home, but not so good for Dan Sherrard," he remarked.

It was at Blundell's store that Harper first caught sight of the man he wanted. Rodney Allan did not look very handsome now. His muddy clothes indicated that he

was employed at the lowest kind of manual labor. Ugly lines had formed around his mouth, and in his eyes was the look, well known to Harper, of a fugitive from justice. Despite his changed appearance, Harper recognized him instantly.

He paid no apparent attention to the man, and, since he did not wear his sheriff's star conspicuously, Allan paid no particular attention to him. Harper wanted, first of all, to confirm beyond a doubt his belief that Alice's mission in Geyser was to meet Allan. Then he wished to see how the man would treat the girl who had gone to such pains to find him. Would he appreciate her efforts? Also, what was his relation to her? Since their names were different, he was evidently neither her brother nor her husband. Therefore he must be her lover.

Allan made an insignificant purchase and sauntered down the roadway in the direction of the Lone Star. He did not seem to notice the typing office opposite the dance hall, and Harper wondered if, after all, he was mistaken in thinking that Allan was the man whom Alice sought. Certainly he was the one described in the circular; but that did not prove that Alice was looking for him.

Allan entered the Lone Star. Harper followed, and sat at a corner table where he could watch the man without being seen.

He had felt chagrined at the possibility that his hypothesis regarding Allan and Alice was incorrect; but now, as he watched Allan, he hoped that it was. The man was not in the Lone Star five minutes before Harper was as well acquainted with his character as though he had known him for years.

Allan's first act was to order whisky; but there was nothing damning in that. It was the manner in which the fellow acted toward one of the dance-hall women—the one called Babe, who had wept when Alice begged the men to write to their mothers—that revealed to Sheriff Jim Harper what kind of man he had to deal with.

Allan called Babe to his table, and she went readily enough, her business there being to help the customers spend their money. He talked to her low and earnest-

ly, and there was nothing particularly wrong about that either. But when Allan grabbed Babe and pulled her over to him in a manner that was too coarse for even a woman of her type to stand, he revealed to Harper the sort of man he was.

The sheriff was minded to arrest him then and there, but he withheld his hand. Despite the fact that Allan had not gone to the typing office, Harper still believed that he was sought by Alice. He would wait a while longer and see what would happen.

It happened quickly enough. When Babe pulled away from him, Allan rose and walked to the open front door and stood there looking across the street. Harper's table was close to this door. He watched the fellow closely.

Allan looked across the street casually. Suddenly he uttered an ejaculation and stood staring as though he had seen a ghost.

"Who—who's that across there?" Allan asked this of a bystander. Harper heard him quite clearly.

"Ain't you heard of her?" replied the other. "Where you been, anyhow? That's the new girl that writes letters for everybody and begs them to get in touch with their people."

"God in Heaven!" Allan muttered.

Harper knew only too well what Allan was thinking, and for the first time in his life he was sorry because he had reasoned out something correctly.

In a moment Allan crossed the street. Harper let him go. Hardened man-hunter as he was, he did not quite have the heart to apprehend the man that Alice Juno had come here to find before she had a chance to speak to him. He stood in the doorway of the Lone Star and watched Allan enter the typing office. He would wait until the man came out, then step across and click handcuffs on his wrists.

In her office, Alice was unusually busy that evening. A patron sat close beside her desk, dictating in a low tone that only he could hear, because of the clatter made by her racing type-bars. Seated along the wall, like customers in a barber shop, others read or thought out their messages while awaiting their turns. Being a touch typist,

as all experts are, she did not need to keep her eyes on her keys. She glanced up as each newcomer entered, smiling if she knew the person, nodding and indicating the waiting line if she did not.

Suddenly she gasped, and her flying fingers faltered for the first time since her arrival in Geyser. Rodney Allan stood in the doorway. He recognized her at the instant that she recognized him, and started toward her, an eager light in his eyes, a glad smile of recognition on his features.

But it was no part of Alice's plan that the public, and eventually the sheriff, should know that Allan was any more to her than any other railroad worker. She shook her head and frowned at him. He stopped short. She indicated the line of chairs and he grasped her message. He took his place there and she transferred her attention back to her work.

She flushed with chagrin as she found that, in the ecstasy of Allan's arrival, her fingers had lost touch with her brain and she had written meaningless words. She was compelled to stop her customer, erase the words, and ask him to dictate his last sentences over again. But he did so without realizing that anything unusual had happened. Nobody in the room knew it. Only a single person, Sheriff Jim Harper, had noticed the little drama, and he was outside, looking through an open window.

It was an ordeal for Alice to write letters for all the men who were there before Allan entered. She did not even have the satisfaction of looking at him, since the line of chairs was behind her. One by one her customers dictated their letters and went out, until finally Allan's turn came to sit close beside her. Others had entered after him and were now awaiting their turn in the same manner that he had.

Alice had regained her composure, and, except for a wonderful look that she flashed at the man beside her, her treatment of him was apparently no different from her treatment of others.

She asked whom he wished to write to, Allan gave a name in the ordinary way, then her typewriter clattered even louder than for the last man. The noise that it made was her only reason for operating it.

They could exchange whispers without being overheard.

Allan spoke first. "Why did you come here?" he asked.

"To find you, of course. I was worried to death, Rodney."

"You're not safe in a town like this."

"I'm all right. It's you that are not safe. Did the sheriff notice you?"

"Who's he? I don't know him. I've never been here before. Went to the job through another town."

"Big man. He wouldn't know you, though. I looked over his notices of men wanted and you weren't among them. But you've got to be careful."

"I will."

"Are you all right, Rodney? You don't look well."

"I'm fine. And you?"

"Good enough. I'll never be really well till you've cleared yourself."

"I'll do that."

"You'd better go now. We can't keep this up. Some one may learn that I know you. That'll never do. The sheriff suspects I'm looking for a wanted man, I think. If he learns that I know you, he may arrest you on suspicion."

"All right. See you again. Good-by."

"Good-by."

Her flying fingers stopped, the noise of her machine ceased, she whirled what looked like his letter out of the roller and handed it to him.

"Sign on the bottom," she stated aloud. "You may leave your letter here if you wish and I'll mail it. One dollar, please." He paid it. "Thanks, and come again."

"I will," said Allan.

He went out, and Alice continued her work. Her eyes were bright now, her bearing buoyant, her smile joyous. For the first time since coming to Geyser, she looked happy. She was blissfully ignorant of what was happening outside.

Allan had not proceeded more than twenty yards from her office before Harper stepped suddenly out of a patch of darkness and handcuffed him.

"What—what's this for?" the prisoner demanded.

"You know," Harper answered.

Allan swore.

"Who gave me away? Did any woman?" he demanded.

Harper winced as he had when Allan tried to embrace the dance-hall girl. This was the man that Alice loved—one who suspected immediately that she might have betrayed him.

"No!" he said. Without further words, Harper took him to the jail and locked him up.

That part of his job was easy enough. Now came the hard part—the task of telling Alice.

He went to her office. At the mere sight of him the happiness drained away from her face. The thought that his appearance affected her like that was like an arrow in his heart.

"I'm sorry, Miss Juno," he said, "but I'm afraid I've got bad news for you."

"What?" she cried, and leaped up from her desk.

"I have arrested Rodney Allan."

She stared at him, horror-stricken. "What for?"

"For embezzlement committed in Willowfield, Ohio. Why? What is he to you?"

"He is my husband!" Alice exclaimed, and after giving this reply she burst into harsh laughter.

VI.

NOT a muscle of Sheriff Jim Harper's face moved as he heard this unwelcome announcement. He was on duty now. Personal feelings were submerged.

"I see," he said. "Would you like to visit Mr. Allan in his cell?"

"Yes," said Alice, and in silence they proceeded to the jail building.

Harper let her in and she remained with the prisoner for nearly an hour. A hard, vengeful expression disfigured her fine features when she came out.

"I want to know a few things," she said. "How did you know that Mr. Allan is wanted for embezzlement in Willowfield?"

"I received a circular stating that he is."

"When?"

"A few days ago."

"Let me see it."

Harper took the notice from his pocket and handed it to her.

"I was here in your office only yesterday," Alice said, "and I didn't see that notice. Where was it?"

"Where you couldn't see it, of course."

"Oh! You kept it hidden from me?"

"Naturally. If you saw it you would warn Allan that I was looking for him. I'd have no chance to catch him then."

"What made you think I would warn him?"

"Because you, too, came from Willowfield."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw the postmark on a letter you received."

She flared up. "Then you are both a sneak and a liar!"

Harper shrugged his shoulders. "Abuse me if you wish. Officers of the law are used to that."

"I mean it. You tricked me by keeping that notice hidden while you led me to believe you were letting me see *all* of them."

"All right. What of it? I am a sheriff, you know."

"Does a sheriff have to become a cheat and a liar?"

"A sheriff must enforce the law. And he couldn't do that if he told everything he knew."

"Oh, I despise you!" Alice cried. "You—you said you were my friend. And all the time you were only leading me into a trap to betray my husband."

"I am still your friend."

"Then prove it. Let your prisoner go." Harper smiled grimly.

"That's impossible."

"It is possible, but you won't do it."

"That's it; I won't."

"Oh, God!" She collapsed into a chair and sobbed.

Harper looked down at her and shook his head in silent pity. Such loyalty to a worthless man! He knew that Allan was worthless just as well as he knew that Alice was one woman in ten thousand. The man's attempted courtship of Babe in the dance had had proved the former. The pity of it. A man whose advances had been re-

jected by a dance hall hussy was loved by such a woman as this. He sat down beside her.

"Mrs. Allan," he said, "I infer from what you said about innocent men being wanted the other day that you think your husband is innocent. Is that right?"

"I know he is innocent," she sobbed.

"What makes you think that? The Willowfield authorities would not send out circulars unless the evidence in their possession was pretty strong."

"He says he is innocent. That is enough."

Harper shrugged his shoulders.

"Why did he run away?"

"Because he could not prove his innocence."

"Are you quite positive that, in addition to being innocent, he is a loyal husband?"

"The best in the world."

"Has he never done anything that might lead you to believe he may not be true to you?"

Alice rose.

"A while ago you spoke about doing your duty," she said. "Does your duty include the making of base insinuations calculated to stir up strife between a husband and wife?"

Harper had been tempted to tell her about the dance hall incident, but, after all, what business of his was it? His duty was done. Alice and his prisoner were husband and wife. He recollects the biblical injunction not to put asunder those whom God has joined together.

"I'm sorry if my remark appeared to be an insinuation," he said.

She rose to go.

"Thank you," she said coldly.

"Would you like me to accompany you to your office?" Harper queried. "It's dangerous for you to go about alone in Geyser on a dark night."

"No," said Alice, and went out.

Harper stood at his door and watched her as she disappeared in the night. Then he slumped down in his chair and sat there, staring straight ahead of him.

Outside, stumbling along the dark patch of roadway, Alice quivered with suppressed

fury as she approached the radius of the Lone Star lights. Her interview with Allan had aroused in her an intense desire to set him free by any means, fair or foul.

The revelry in the dance hall was reaching its climax. None of the sensible workers who sought only mild recreation remained. No one that was even half sober was in the place now. The tin-panny piano whanged, a fiddle screeched, a trombone blared. Heavy feet scuffed the floor, drunken laughter boomed, the shrill cries of abandoned women cut through the hideous din of the riotous night. Outside an occasional sinister figure slithered through the darkness like a prowling wolf.

But it was not of the danger that menaced a lone woman on every hand that Alice thought. A new and terrible idea was sizzling in her brain.

Those men in the Lone Star! She had swayed the men of Geyser once; had moved them by the power of her voice and personality to do what she wanted them to do. Could she repeat the performance?

Obviously the Lone Star revelers were in the mood for mischief. Could she inspire them to real deviltry? Could she make them do a lawless thing? Could she persuade them to raid Jim Harper's jail and liberate the man she loved?

She played with the thought as a child plays with fire. The law had cheated and tricked her; why should she not trick and cheat the law?

She felt suddenly that she could do it; that she could enter that sink hole of iniquity and move the reckless men there to do her bidding. A sense of power welled up within her. Why not use her power?

Allan was guiltless of any wrongdoing, and yet, through the power of circumstantial evidence and the technique of the law that makes one partner liable for the wrongdoing of the other, he would probably have to spend long years in prison. But she could save him from it.

Suddenly her mind was made up. She hurried to the evil resort and entered it.

Sherrard was at her side immediately, his snaky eyes agleam, his oily smile spread wide upon his degenerate features.

"You!" he cried. "Never was anybody

half so welcome! You have reconsidered my offer. You have come to me at last!"

"Sherrard," Alice snapped, "I want you to do me a favor. I want to talk to these men. Will you let me?"

Sherrard made a sweeping bow.

"My dearest girl," he said, "the place is yours."

VII.

THERE was a little stage at the end of the dancing floor and it was toward this, under Sherrard's leadership, that Alice made her way.

She paid no attention to the fact that, in merely setting foot inside a resort of this nature, a respectable woman endangered her reputation. Sights that at other times would have sent her scurrying out of any such place made no impression on her now. She brushed against painted women that she had shrunk from on the street as though they were afflicted with leprosy and the contact affected her not at all. Blasphemous ejaculations and lewd phrases reached her ears, but did not register on her mind. Leering looks went unnoticed. Sherrard's significant phrase, "my dearest girl," carried no sinister meaning to her single-purposed mind.

She thought of only one thing: she had unwittingly delivered the man she loved into the hands of the law and she proposed to brew a storm of disorder and lawlessness that would set him free. The possibility that she herself might be engulfed in such a storm did not occur to her any more than the thought of a holocaust occurs to a child who strikes matches.

On the platform Sherrard held up his hand and demanded attention, and in a moment he secured it.

"Men," he shouted with no more regard for the women in his employ than if they were pins in his bowling alley, "this little girl wants to talk to you, and I want you to listen. You know who she is: she's the sweet-faced kid that mails your alimony to your ex-wife when you don't want to do it yourself. You may have got the impression that she's a stuck-up sister who considers herself too good to play around with rough guys like you and me, but that's

where you're mistaken. She's a regular fellow!"

A drink-crazed reveler let loose a war whoop and flung his hat at the ceiling.

"Hurrah for lil girl!" he shouted. "Go to it, kid; we're all ears, like a jackass."

A wild outburst of shouts and cheers seconded this sentiment. The tumult added fresh fuel to the flame of Alice's reckless desire.

"My friends—" she began.

"You bet we're your friends!"

"It wasn't only to write letters for you that I came to Geyser. Principally it was to find the man who means more to me than anybody else in the world."

"Hurrah for the man!"

"He was driven away from home, men, by the same kind of misfortune that probably drove some of you away from your friends and family. He was unjustly accused of embezzling money. He didn't—it was his partner—but he was equally liable, so he ran away and came out here to try to earn enough money to make good his partner's theft. I don't know whether any of you know Rodney Allan or not—"

"I know him," some one shouted.

"So do I; he's all right."

It did not occur to Alice that encomiums from men such as these were questionable recommendations of character.

"Boys," she went on, "when I came to Geyser, under my maiden name of Juno, the first man I met was your sheriff, Jim Harper. He acted like a pretty good fellow. He helped me get started in business, he swore he would protect me, he said he would do anything he could to further my interests.

"But he didn't, men. All he wanted was to gain my confidence, so he could learn my real business. He suspected that I wanted to get in touch with some one who was wanted by the police, and he made up his mind to learn who the man was and grab the reward that would be offered for his capture. That's the kind of a friend Jim Harper is.

He succeeded, boys. He was too smart for me. He knows all the tricks of the man-catching trade, and I don't. One of his schemes was to encourage me to look at the

Man Wanted circulars on file in his office in the hope, as I can see now, that I would betray myself if one of them described the man I was looking for. He hadn't received a notice about Mr. Allan then, so he failed in that scheme.

"His next piece of trickery was to examine my personal letters. He found out that I came from Willowfield, Ohio. Then he received a circular saying that Rodney Allan was wanted there, and he put two and two together and rightly guessed that Mr. Allan was the man I was trying to find.

"Then came his lowest trick of all. Harper pretended to show me all his new circulars, but he kept the Allan one concealed. That prevented me from putting Mr. Allan on his guard. Mr. Allan learned that I was here, as I figured he would, and this evening he came to see me. Harper was on the lookout for him. He recognized him from his picture and description and locked him up."

Angry growls from her audience encouraged Alice.

"As if that wasn't enough, men," she went on, "this noble sheriff of yours insinuated that the man I came here to find is not worth my efforts on his behalf, is not true to me. No straight-out accusation, mind you; just a mean insinuation that Mr. Allan is no good. What do you think of an effort like that to separate a husband and wife? Because that is what we are, my friends. Rodney Allan is my husband!"

Fierce cries rang out.

"T' hell with Jim Harper!"

"We seen him tryin' to make love to you."

"You're the kind of a wife to have."

At the side of the hall the woman called Babe rose and began to push through the crowd to Alice's platform. Sherrard saw her and grabbed her roughly by the arm.

"What's eatin' you?" he demanded.

"I want to tell that girl something," Babe said. "She's a good kid; she got me writin' to my mother. I want to tell her that Harper is right; her man is a dirty dog."

Sherrard shook her. "You open your trap about that, Babe, and I'll hand you a wallop. Understand?" He pushed her away and she returned to her seat.

Alice was playing upon the emotions of her reckless audience now as a musician plays upon a harp. In passionate language she appealed to them to cheat Jim Harper of his prey, to storm his flimsy jail and liberate Rodney Allan. They could easily do it, she said. In the darkness Harper would not recognize them.

Were they real men, she asked, or only imitation men? Would they allow a helpless woman to be bullied and cheated and lied to by a brute of a sheriff? Would they give their companion worker, Rodney Allan, a chance to earn the money he was charged with stealing and thus prevent his conviction, on technical evidence, for a crime he did not commit? She ended up with the greatest oratorical effort of her life, and, quivering like a leaf, awaited their verdict.

It came quickly.

"We're with you, kid!"

"Lead us to him!"

"You're dam' right we'll get Allan out!"

"T' hell with the sheriff an' the law!"

Sherrard said nothing at all. He stood at one side, eying Alice as a cat eyes a mouse within reach of its claws, an evil smirk upon his degenerate features.

A great hair giant of a man appointed himself leader of the mob. "Follow me, boys," he cried. "Let's go!"

Pell-mell, the men tumbled out into the street, shouting and singing ribald songs. Alice was at their head. Sherrard remained behind in his establishment. Liquor and excitement had not robbed him of his wits. He would play the fox's game. His crazy patrons could brave the danger; he would reap the reward.

Toward the temporary jail in which Sheriff Harper lodged his prisoners before taking them to a stronger one, the mob made its disorderly way. Some had lighted makeshift torches, such as brooms and rags tied to sticks after being soaked in kerosene, and the flickering tongues of fire from these shot high into the darkness of the night, lighting up the marches in weird and terrifying fashion.

VIII.

THE tumult of such an advance could not fail to awaken any one within a quarter

of a mile. While they were still two hundred feet from the impromptu jail—a flimsy wooden structure, hurriedly flung together at the first influx of the disorderly element—a light flared up inside, showing that Harper was out of bed and doubtless preparing for the coming encounter. As the marchers approached, his door flung open, releasing a long shaft of light that fell upon the mob leaders and caused them to slow up a bit, and Jim Harper stood there confronting them.

He was fully dressed, except for his coat. His pistol belt was about his waist, showing two holsters with heavy pistol butts sticking out of them. He stood there with a grim smile upon his firm features and eyed the approaching rabble with an expression of contempt that suddenly changed to one of grave concern as he descried the girl he knew as Alice Juno at their head.

"That's far enough!" he shouted. "Stay right where you are. I can hear anything you say. Another step and somebody is liable to get hurt." His fingers played with the butts of his guns.

The mob was not too reckless to heed his words. Those in front stopped dead in their tracks. Those behind continued to advance, and for a little while succeeded in pushing the front line forward. Then Harper whipped out two guns and the whole body halted as though their feet were caught by invisible traps, but not before they had arrived within thirty or forty feet of him.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

Alice, in front, paid no more attention to his guns than if they had been firecrackers. She walked right up to him.

"We want Rodney Allan!" she proclaimed.

Harper's reply was calm.

"You know that's impossible."

"We're going to get him," Alice cried. "You can't fight off thirty or forty men. You'd better give him up."

"What will you do if I don't?"

"Storm your jail. Burn it down. Anything."

"Some one will get hurt."

"It'll be you, then." With a spring that took Harper by surprise she flung herself upon him and grasped him around the neck.

THE STORM WOMAN.

"I've got him," she cried to the men behind her. "Come on!"

Alice's unexpected onslaught threw Harper off his balance and sent him staggering backward. Her slim arms, tightening about his neck, were choking him. He continued to clutch his guns, and for that reason could not use his fingers to wrench her arms away from his neck, but he had no thought of firing the weapons. Seeing his predicament, the mob surged into the office and piled up on Harper, forcing him down on the floor. Alice released him as the others grabbed him, and darted for a key that was hanging on a nail.

As the sheriff and his assailants engaged in a desperate conflict on the floor, rolling over and over, upsetting chairs and tables, one of his guns was kicked out of his hands and clattered across the floor. Alice grabbed it.

He retained the other and could undoubtedly have used it to deadly effect had he chosen. But even in the extremity of his struggle against overwhelming odds, his first thought was for Alice. He could not see whom he was fighting. For all he knew, she was one of the many who were overpowering him, and on that account he refrained from firing. He even withdrew his finger from the trigger, lest the weapon should go off accidentally. He managed to get his right hand, which held it, underneath his body, and on his knees like a wrestler with half a dozen men on top of him, he ceased struggling for a moment in preparation for another effort to throw off his assailants.

Meanwhile Alice, with the key, rushed to the cell door. The prisoner, of course, was awake. With the first appearance of the mob, Allan had crumpled in his cell as dreadful thoughts of lynchers came to his mind; then, as he saw Alice through the bars, he realized that the mob meant to free, not lynch him, and he stood palpitating at the cell door and yelling encouragement to Alice and her followers.

She unlocked the door and thrust the pistol she had picked up into her husband's hand. "Run!" she cried. "Get into the bush outside the town and then make for the mountains."

Allan grabbed the gun and made for the door.

Still on his knees, with his assailants on top of him, Harper caught a glimpse of the prisoner escaping and the sight nerved him to a supreme effort. Since his pistol hand was free, he was able to jam the gun into his holster. That enabled him to use his right hand. With a prodigious effort, he heaved to his feet and struck out with both hands, working toward the door as he did so.

Only one thought was in his mind now: to recapture the prisoner whom he had seen escaping. He fought his way out, flung off his last enemy, and, seeing Allan dashing for the near-by trees that fringed a creek, he made after him at top speed.

Meanwhile an unexpected development had been taking place outside the jail. Many of the mob had been unable to get inside Harper's office, and others probably retained sense enough to keep out, and these had set fire to the building, doubtless with the idea of freeing the prisoner by that most desperate of all methods should their other efforts fail. The fact that they might incinerate Allan in the process had evidently not occurred to them.

With Harper gone, the men inside the structure came tumbling out, Alice along with them, and so surprised and delighted were they by the blood-tingling sight of a building afame that they were diverted from their purpose of pursuing the sheriff.

The blaze was rapidly gaining headway. Red ribbons of flame were darting higher and higher, licking at the black sky like the fiery tongues of monsters from the inferno, lighting up the faces of men whose passions were as uncontrolled as the flames. The fire crackled, spat, and cannonaded, as it gnawed at the dry board structure.

Its fury seemed to add to the triumphant frenzy of the men who had been intoxicated with liquor, to begin with. They were beside themselves now. All thought of the escaped prisoner seemed to vanish. They had accomplished what they set out to do, and now they would celebrate their triumph. Their wild shouts, like those of Indians on the war path, rang out above the fierce accompaniment of the roaring flames. They danced and flung hats into the air.

But Alice did not join their revels. A sudden revulsion of feeling swept over her as she saw Jim Harper's personal and treasured belongings menaced by the fiery destroyer. After all, Harper had done various deeds of kindness for her; he was only doing his duty now.

Alone, she dashed into the office before the flames, which had been kindled at the back of the structure, reached it. She grabbed one end of his cot and dragged it outside.

"Help me!" she cried to her followers. "We've got to save his stuff."

"T' hell with his stuff!" shouted some one in reply. "Let 'er burn."

She was going back into the place alone for more of Harper's belongings when a heavy hand grasped her shoulder and the big man who had acted as mob leader grinned at her.

"Never mind that, girly," he said. "We're all goin' back to the Lone Star to licker up and celebrate *right*." Before she could protest he picked her up as though she were a doll and swung her to a sitting posture on his massive shoulder.

"Come on, boys!" he cried. "Back to the joint! Let's make a night of it!"

Alice was helpless. Her captor called for cheers for her, and these were given with ear-splitting vigor. The gang started singing "We Won't Go Home Till Morning," and set off for the saloon, leaving the fire to burn itself out.

IX.

To Alice, perched on the shoulder of a man who was intoxicated with both liquor and excitement, the triumphant parade back to the Lone Star was not the hilarious event that it was to the others.

She wanted to escape from this crazy mob, but her chance to do so seemed slim. She had no desire to participate in a bar-room celebration with drunken men and abandoned women. Now that her husband had been set free, she felt a reaction against the lawless disorder of the night.

But, having brewed the storm, she realized that it would be no easy matter to escape from the effects of it.

At the dance hall, the man who carried her on his shoulders seemed to sense her desire to quit the riotous assemblage, and he made it his business to guard her as though she were a prisoner.

"Up to the bar, everybody!" he called out, and pushed Alice there along with the others. "What'll you have, sister?" he asked her.

"Nothing," said Alice. "I don't drink."

"Bunk!" he cried. "You can't come that on this bunch. Wine for the lady!" he shouted, and the bartender set a glass of the sparkling beverage on the counter in front of her.

Everybody was looking at her, seemingly in wonder that she was not as enthusiastic in celebrating their victory over law and order as she had been in battling for that victory. She did not wish to antagonize them; she felt that she owed them a great deal, indeed, so, by way of showing her appreciation of their efforts on her behalf, she swallowed the wine.

"Want to set 'em up for the crowd?" the bartender asked her.

"Sure she does!" bellowed her giant companion.

She paid for the round—a large amount, since the Lone Star was packed now with all-night revelers from other resorts who had heard about the jail delivery. It seemed a sinful waste of money to spend so much for liquor. She would have preferred to reward the men in some other way, but since they were not backward about informing her that this was the reward they preferred, she "set 'em up" a second time, and then a third.

Then the dancing started.

Alice had no desire to dance, but she quickly found that she was virtually compelled to do so. On all sides she was surrounded by her celebrating companions. The first grabbed her as though she were one of the painted women, and she pulled away from him, only to pitch into the arms of another member of the gang. This one treated her in a less rowdy manner, and she circled the floor with him, after which he passed her along to a hilarious companion, who danced with her for a while and in turn passed her to another man.

She felt cheap and sordid and low, but there did not seem to be anything she could do about it. She flashed a silent appeal at Dan Sherrard, who watched her from the little platform at the end of the dancing space. He grinned at her in a peculiar manner, but did not come to her aid.

Men and women were dancing now with glasses of liquor in their hands. They thrust these glasses into Alice's face and insisted that she should drink. She refused—she was determined not to drink another drop no matter what happened—and this enraged one man to such an extent that he threw his glass of liquor into her face. A fight threatened then, but the man was dragged away and the "fun" proceeded. The woman called Babe wiped Alice's face and said, "You gotta get used to rough guys like that, deary."

Suddenly the big fellow who had born her to the dance hall on his shoulder elbowed his way through the mob that surrounded her, and, before she knew what he was about, seized her as before and boosted her up on top of a table.

"Le's see y' dance, kid," he said.

Enraged and alarmed now, Alice looked down at the crowd that surged around her, laughing and shouting, cheering her and commanding her to dance.

"I won't!" she cried. "You have no right to ask me to make a show of myself!"

"Huh? Wha's matter, kid?" The big fellow was leering up into her face. "Ain't we all havin' good time togezzer? Ain't gettin' 'shamed o' your little playmates, are yuh?"

Looking all around her, Alice saw that the drunken grins of the men were slowly giving way to more alarming expressions.

"I want to get out of here!" she exclaimed, and tried to jump to the floor.

Hands clutched her ankles and held her to the table top.

"What t' hell's the matter with you?" snarled the big fellow. "Ain't we good enough for you? We were all right a little while ago when you wanted us to set that damned good-for-nothin' husband of yours free. We did it, didn't we? An' now we can go t' hell! We can, heh?"

"Are you insane? Do you know what you're saying?" she cried.

The big fellow's laughter rang through the hall. An ominous silence had fallen on the lawless assemblage. Scowls were on every face.

"Think we swallowed that guff o' yours about Allan bein' an innocent guy? The hell we did! Think we don't know him? I'll say we do! Right this evenin' he was here, lappin' up booze and tryin' to get fresh with the girls—"

"You lie!"

"How about it, boys?" The big fellow appealed to his companions. "Ain't that guy that we got out o' jail the same one that was gettin' fresh with Babe?"

"He sure was."

"Helluva nerve she's got, pullin' that Sunday-go-to-meetin' stuff on us."

"His wife? Maybe!"

These and similar expressions came from every side.

"You are liars! All of you!" Alice looked down into the sea of brutal, leering faces. "Let me out of here," she cried.

"Not till we're through with you, kid," answered the big fellow. "Not till you show a lil appreciation of what we done for you. We risked a heap o' trouble to get your man out, an' now, by Jupiter, you're goin' to give us a little fun."

Alice glimpsed Sherrard, elbowing through the crowd to her table. He reached her side and whispered:

"You're in a bad jam, girlie. I can get you out, but you got to be nice to me afterward. See? I've been struck on you from the minute I saw you—"

With all her strength Alice slapped Sherrard's face.

"All right, damn you! The wolves can have you. I'm through." The proprietor moved away, cursing and swearing.

Babe saw him coming in her direction and moved hastily off. She was afraid of Sherrard. She went out to the veranda and stood there, looking in at Alice, and from her to the distant lights of the nearest railroad camp.

Around the table on which Alice still stood, the crowd of brutes jammed closer and closer. She looked down into their evil

faces. She recollects that these men were the lowest dregs of all the camps on the line. The stench of their liquor-laden breath was in her nostrils.

There was no drunken joviality in their expression now. Because she refused to participate in their revel in the same way that the abandoned women of the place did, they seemed to think that she had duped and cheated them. Their drink-inflamed eyes, on a level with her ankles, looked scarcely human. In all that crowd, now that Babe was gone, there was not one friendly face. The female habitués, delighted with the opportunity for revenge upon a woman who had spurned them in the past, were as merciless as the men.

In a flash of understanding, Alice realized now what a dreadful mistake she had made when she inflamed these bestial men to lawless conduct. Deliberately, with the power of her eloquence, she had brewed a storm. She had persuaded them to outrage the law that was her sole protection against their evil nature. Without the law, she could not have existed in Geyser. She had temporarily abolished that law without taking into account that in so doing she had swept away the bulwark that protected her. Now she stood alone, unprotected, powerless to save herself from the abyss of anarchy that she herself had uncovered.

"Shake it up, kid! If you think you can get us to do your dirty work and then tell us to go to hell, you got another guess comin'. Show us the hootchy-kootchy!"

A closed fist jabbed at her ankles, and she kicked the owner of it full in the face. His snarl of rage was echoed by the others. Many hands reached up at her.

Then the miracle happened. Her agonized eyes caught sight of a figure that lurched through the open door—a man with blood on his face and clothing torn, but with a glint of determination in his eyes that brought an involuntary prayer of thanksgiving to her lips. The man was Sheriff Jim Harper!

X.

When Harper caught sight of his prisoner, Allan, dashing out into the night, his

one and only thought was to recapture him. In the darkness he could see the fellow's vague outline flitting toward the cottonwoods by the creek and he made after him on the run. His pace was none too fast, because of the high-heeled riding boots he wore. Presently Allan gained the shelter of the trees and disappeared among them.

The pistol that Harper had placed in his holster was still there, and as he ran he drew it for a shot at the fleeing figure in front. Then a thought came to him and he withheld his fire, thus allowing Allan to reach the cottonwoods. The fugitive was the man that Alice loved; he must not injure him if it was possible to capture him otherwise.

Harper did not know that Allan possessed his other gun, the one that had been kicked out of his hand and which Alice had handed to the prisoner. He was soon to find out, however. A sharp report rang out in front, a stab of fire cut the darkness, and the zip of a bullet warned Harper that he had narrowly escaped being hit. He jumped behind a tree and returned the shot.

He knew now that it was his missing weapon that Allan possessed. Its report was familiar. Five of its six chambers had been loaded, the one underneath the hammer being empty as always, and of these cartridges one had been fired. There remained four shots at Allan's command.

Harper, on the other hand, still had his belt around his waist, and thus possessed abundant ammunition.

The sheriff paused for a moment behind his tree, then edged forward to the shelter of another. Allan's gun barked again and again missed, and Harper heard the man's footsteps splashing in the creek and clambering up the high rim-rock beyond it. He hurried to the creek and crossed it as noiselessly as possible, but not without drawing another shot. That left two in Allan's gun. Also the fugitive disclosed his position, halfway up the cliff.

Pistol in hand, Harper ran to a pathway near by and made his way as fast as possible upward to the high benchland that lay on that side of the town. From the occasional sounds that Allan made he knew

that the fugitive, unaware of the path's existence, was also making his way upward with less speed and more difficulty.

At the top, Harper lay prone on the ground for two reasons. He was winded, and, in the moonlight that now lighted up the scene to some extent, he would be able to sight Allan when the latter reached the top.

In a moment the fugitive appeared over the rim. Harper rose and ran forward.

Allan, hearing the footsteps of his pursuer, ran also—not away from the rim along the level land, but along the edge of it as though in search of a draw or coulée into which he could escape.

To halt his quarry, Harper fired a shot into the air. Allan turned then and fired twice in quick succession. Harper felt a stinging sensation in his shoulder, but he did not halt. Allan had no more cartridges. The pursuit would soon be over. He yelled to the fugitive to stop, but the latter paid no attention.

Harper fired again—not at the man, because he was Alice's husband, but in the air in an effort to frighten him into surrender. It only caused Allan to dash to the edge of the rim-rock. He stood there for a second and Harper figured that he had him. He approached to within a few feet. He knew that beyond Allan there was a sheer drop of many feet to jagged rocks below.

Allan, however, did not seem to know that. Apparently he thought that the rim-rock at this point was formed in the same manner as at the point where he clambered up. He put his hand on the ground and jumped over, evidently expecting to land on his feet two or three feet below.

His feet struck nothing. He tried to recover himself with the hand he had placed on the rim. In the moonlight that now lighted up the scene to some extent, Harper glimpsed a frightful look on the man's face as he grasped at the edge of the rock for a hold. He tried to grab Allan's hand to pull him up, but he was too late. The man's fingers slipped over the edge. A horrible thud sounded from below.

As fast as he could, Harper made his way downward to where Allan lay. He was un-

conscious, but his heart was beating. Harper hoisted him to his shoulder and staggered down the slope. The sky-licking flames from his burning jail helped to light his pathway. The pain in his own shoulder was increasing and his strength was beginning to ebb, but still he staggered along, carrying the unconscious husband of the woman he loved.

In the meantime the dance-hall girl known as Babe was also engaged in a desperate effort. When she ran out of the Lone Star and looked back at Alice she tried to think of some way to help the girl who had befriended her. Seeing the lights of a railroad camp in the distance, she decided to go there and summon help. She ran at first, but speedily found that she did not possess the stamina for such strenuous exercise. Sobbing and gasping for breath, she stumbled on through the darkness.

Only too well she realized the danger that threatened the girl who had inspired her to write to her mother for the first time in years. In her queer way, she loved Alice. The typist had been so sympathetic: had not laughed at the palpable lies she dictated to her mother; had even suggested additional ones. Anything to make her mother happy, she said. And Babe's mother had replied! Babe had sent money home then, had re-established family ties, had felt almost respectable again when her mother invited her to spend a month or two at the old home.

That was an impossible proposition, of course. Only too well, Babe knew that she would unwittingly betray her real character ten minutes after she struck the old town. But letters from her mother arrived regularly now. They were the only bright spots in an existence that she loathed but could not escape from, and never would she forget the girl who had made them possible.

After what seemed hours of labored effort, Babe glimpsed a light in the bunkhouse, and toward it she directed her wobbling footsteps. The door was unlocked and she plunged in. All the occupants were in bed and apparently asleep. The oil lamp was turned low, for some late-comer probably.

Babe spied a tin wash basin. She seized

it and pounded upon it with the dipper. Immediately men sat up, sleepy-eyed and profane, demanding to know the cause of the disturbance.

"The girl that writes letters!" Babe gasped. "They've got her in the Lone Star and they won't let her out. They're makin' her drink, makin' her dance! For the love o' Gawd, get her out, men; get her out!"

A man jumped out of his bunk and dived into his clothes with no more regard for Babe's presence than if she were a wooden post.

"Come on, boys!" he cried. "We'll show that joint what's what. We'll clean 'em out! Are you with me?"

Every man in the bunkhouse was. They flung into necessary garments, shot out the door, and set off for town on the run. Babe trailed along far behind.

XI.

Alice's joy when she beheld her husband that evening for the first time in many months had been great, but not so great as was her joy now at the sight of Jim Harper in the doorway of the Lone Star.

Two seconds before he appeared she was in the worst panic of her life. Fear had almost paralyzed her. Vicious eyes were gleaming up at her from all sides, hands were reaching up and grasping at her ankles and skirts. In another moment she would have been pulled down from the table to a fate that she dared not guess at.

But now Jim Harper had arrived! Instantly her peril seemed to dissipate. True, he was badly done up, but what of that? The sight of his broad shoulders, his determined features, his glinting eyes, was like the sight of water to a traveler crazed with thirst. For the first time she realized that during all the days she had been in Geyser he was a prop upon which she had unwittingly leaned. He was the law! The same law that she had just now mocked and derided and rebelled against. What a fool she had been to unleash the storm that had temporarily routed the law! At its very worst, it was still immeasurably preferable to the anarchy that followed it.

But the damage was done, the storm was unleashed, and the mere fact that she wished order restored did not necessarily mean that it would be restored. With a fresh chill of apprehension, she realized that Harper was only one man against fifty or sixty—an exhausted man at that.

At first sight of the sheriff the mob that surrounded her had momentarily ceased its tumult; but now, as the men realized the sheriff's spent condition and recollecting that they had, as they thought, run him out of town, the spirit of disorder inspired them afresh, and they let loose a pandemonium of yells and cries of what they would do to him if he tried to interfere.

Harper regarded them for a moment in silence. His strength was going fast, but this was the supreme moment of his life. The woman he loved was in peril—deadly peril. In their present drunken and inflamed state, the brutes who surrounded her would stop at nothing. He drew his pistol and summoned every ounce of his remaining strength. This, the biggest effort of his life, must not fail.

He held his pistol by his side and advanced to within three or four feet of the edge of the crowd. Every eye was upon him.

"A passage!" he demanded. "Open it, or I'll shoot it open!"

His gun pointed toward the table. The man immediately in front of it edged to one side, then the next did likewise. This left a third man directly in front of the pistol. Evidently he meant to stand his ground. But Harper's glinting eyes were upon him, and so was the sinister black muzzle of the gun, so he, too, edged out of the line of fire. In thirty seconds there was a clear pathway between Alice's table and the sheriff. She leaped down, dashed along it, and stood panting beside her rescuer.

Together they backed toward the door, the mob inching forward as the two retreated, but held at bay, despite its overwhelming numbers, by the gleam in Harper's eye and the threat of the pistol in his hand.

Yells sounded outside, and Alice wheeled in alarm to face this fresh menace.

Then she saw it was no menace. It was the men that Babe had aroused at the grad-

ing camp. They gathered around her and Harper until they grasped the situation, then flung themselves upon the mob that kept inching forward as steadily as Harper kept retreating.

The scene that followed was probably the wildest that had ever occurred in that theater of many disorderly affairs. Fists swung on every side, curses mingled with groans, tables crashed to the floor, women screamed, pandemonium reigned. One of the big hanging oil lamps was struck by a chair swung high overhead by some frantic battler, and fell, blazing, to the floor. A fire started in some tawdry draperies and everybody made for the doors.

All at once Alice realized that she was safe and that Harper was by her side. His arm was around her shoulder. Somehow it gave her a delicious feeling of security. Her battle was at an end. She wanted to rest. She wondered where her husband was. She wanted to ask, but she could not. A feeling of drowsiness was overpowering her. She fainted.

The fighting ceased as the blaze inside grew. There was no attempt to save the Lone Star by the men who had just arrived from the camp. In fact they yelled their approval of its destruction just as the mob had previously cheered the burning of the jail. Harper shouted orders to them to get pails from Blundell's store and form a bucket brigade to wet down the buildings adjacent to the dance hall and thus keep the fire from spreading. They began to carry out his orders, and then he carried Alice across to her door, which he burst open since he did not have the key, and laid her on her couch.

Babe came stumbling in at that moment, breathing like a broken bellow.

"Is—is she hurt?" she gasped.

"No," said Harper. "Just fainted. All right in a minute. Stay here with her till I come back, will you?"

Babe was very willing to do this, and Harper left the office. He saw that the fire was being brought under control, and he proceeded shakily to the residence of the railroad doctor, stationed in the village, where he had the slight but painful bullet wound in his shoulder dressed.

In her office, Alice awoke to find Babe seated beside her couch.

"Where is Mr. Harper?" she asked.

"He'll be back in a little while," Babe told her.

"My husband—do you know anything about him?"

"Not a thing, dearie—except that if Harper is back your husband is back too."

"Who brought the men from the camp here, Babe?"

"I did," said the dance-hall woman proudly. Tears softened her hard eyes. "You—you got me writing to my mother, dearie," she said. "I—I'd do anything for you."

Alice looked at her.

"You are too good for the kind of life you are leading, Babe," she said.

The woman cried softly. "Too late now," she said. "I can't get away from it. The best I can do is keep sending money to mother and think up new lies about how well I'm doing in a department store."

Alice looked at the woman again. A great question was in her mind now. Those assertions of the men in the Lone Star that her husband was a rotter—could they have a basis of truth? Why had Harper asked her if she was quite sure her husband was true to her? She recollects various little acts of Rodney Allan that, in the light of this new and terrible possibility, seemed a bit suspicious.

"Babe," she said, "you wouldn't lie to me like those men in the saloon, would you?"

Babe seized her hand.

"So help me God, I won't."

"Then tell me, Babe—you know what goes on in the Lone Star—is my husband, Mr. Allan, anything—anything like those men said he was?"

Babe burst out sobbing.

"Is he?" Alice clutched the woman's arm.

Babe nodded.

Alice sank back on her couch and for a moment lay there in silent misery. Then she whispered: "Tell me—all about it—please."

Babe braced up. "Only this evening he wanted me to beat it to Mexico with him.

Said he. "I had the swag he got away with in Willowfield. He's been after me like that for a long time. I wouldn't go, and he got rough, and I slapped his face."

For a poignant moment the two women looked at each other. Then their hands met and they held to each other like drowning persons. It was Alice who spoke first.

"Babe, dear," she said, "there was a time not long ago when I couldn't understand why some women fall to the very bottom. But now I do understand!"

The door opened presently and Sheriff Jim Harper entered.

"Jim," said Alice in a tone that was as hard and cold as Babe's used to be, "where is my husband?"

The big sheriff did not answer immediately. He looked at her with sorrowful eyes as though dreading to speak.

"Where?" cried Alice.

Harper sat down beside her couch.

"Please try to be brave, Alice," he said. "It isn't good news that I have for you."

THE END.



VISION

THE lure of the cold god, gold,
And the power,
Calling—to you and me.
We will buy—rare jewels;
The homage of men; the smiling lips
Of women.
And happiness
Will not be ours.

The beckoning banner of ambition
Claiming every hour,
Wheedling youth to lonely thrones
Of honor.
We will have—you and I,
The plaudits of the crowd.
And content
Will not be ours.

We can achieve—you and I,
A crown of fame and a hoard
Of gold; and we can later
Wistfully regret
We did not sometimes
Play.

"Is he—" Alice was staring at him, horror in her eyes.

Harper nodded. "He is dead, yes. He fell over the rim-rock in trying to escape. He was alive when I picked him up, but when I got him into the village he wasn't."

For a time silence reigned. Then Harper spoke again, slowly and softly,

"If there's anything I can do, Alice—"

There was no reply for a moment. Her head was turned away. But presently she spoke.

"There is something, Jim," she said at last. "I want you to go away now. Leave me alone with Babe. She understands me and I understand her. But you may come back, Jim. And if you wish to, you may try to restore my faith in mankind. Perhaps you'll succeed, perhaps not—but I hope you can, Jim."

Harper pressed her hand.

"I can, dear," he said.

Then he went out. A great new happiness was in his heart.



The Dance of Death

By FRED JACKSON

Author of "*The First Law*," "*The Third Act*," "*The Diamond Necklace*," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

DA COSTA, handsome dancing star of the new ultrafashionable "King of Clubs," is recognized by Bartlett, gambler and sportsman, as his ungrateful and double-crossing protégé. In a private room the pair quarrel fiercely, with the result that the gambler murders his former pupil. Katherine Kendall, beautiful heiress, is the first person to see the dead form of the man with whom she had been somewhat infatuated. To save Katherine from unpleasant notoriety incident to the investigation, Garret Carpenter, her deserving suitor, persuades the restaurant proprietor to aid him fathom the mystery before notifying the police and to keep the tragic news from the patrons. Bartlett, who has returned to his table, manages to reassume his old confidence as he asks for his check preparatory to leaving the place. He is astounded to learn that through the irony of circumstances, the management of the King of Clubs had arranged to allow no guest to go home until daylight to insure a prolonged success of the opening night. There are perhaps six hours before daylight, and the blood stain from the wound incurred in the struggle with Da Costa is spreading slowly through the waistcoat and coat—until it appears ominously dark and wet. It is a fight between that dead man upstairs and himself!

CHAPTER VI—(Continued).

"LET THE DANCE GO ON."

UPSTAIRS, meanwhile, Silvers was pacing the floor. He had locked himself into the French drawing-room with the corpse, over which he had thrown a white cloth. From time to time

he glanced at it from under knitted brows as he waited.

At Garry's knock he admitted him promptly.

"I suppose the next thing is to look for clews," he said, without wasting any time. "I thought we'd better do that together—in case of trouble with the police later on!"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 28.

I dare say," agreed Garry.

They drew back the white cloth and bent over Da Costa, without disturbing anything.

"There was evidently a struggle," said Garry at once. "His clothes have been mussed up a good deal—that's plain. He resisted his assailant—or began the fight himself."

"Looks like it!"

"That seems to preclude the possibility of its having been a woman," added Garry then.

"Maybe." Silvers was noncommittal. "I have known women to put up a pretty good struggle—at times!"

Garry made no answer to this; he was examining Da Costa's clothes.

"No pockets in the trousers; they fit better without," he observed. "A wallet in his coat—some silver—three keys—handkerchiefs. That's all!"

"The keys might tell us something if we can find out anything about them!" said Silvers. "Anything in the wallet?"

"Money," said Garry, investigating. "Cards—that's all!"

They looked at each other.

"Well?"

"Well?"

"I suppose if one knew about finger-prints the knife might tell us something," mused Garry. "But my education stops short there." He covered the body with the cloth again and stood up. "We'd better see what the maid and the check-room boy have to say!"

Silvers went to the door and called the woman by name, and she appeared promptly. It was clear that she had been anticipating the summons and was reveling in the sudden importance the tragedy had conferred upon her. She was only too eager to be questioned.

"Ada," said Silvers, "you know what has gone on in here to-night?"

"Yes, sir," said Ada.

"What do you know about it?"

"Well, sir—not much," said Ada, "though I came running in when the gentleman there did—and saw him—Da Costa, I mean, lying there dead. It was the team brought me, like it brought him—

only he must have been nearer, because he was here first!"

"You heard no unusual sounds from this room before the scream?" asked Garry.

"Well, no, sir. I'm not saying there were no sounds! But with lending a hand here—and taking a stitch there—as the ladies come up for repairs and the like—why—I wasn't paying much attention to anything outside my own room. And then, the noise downstairs, and the band and all. I never heard a sound till I heard the scream; but that was so shrill and so kind of hurt and awful—it just went through me—and brought me out almost in spite of myself, you might say!"

"Did you hear or see Da Costa when he came up?" asked Silvers.

"No, sir. I heard nothing but the scream, until he went through the room searching like as if he was expecting to find the young lady, and called 'Katherine! Katherine!' twice, like that—and then I heard a kind of dull thud in the Turkish room, and in he came carrying her—and her as white as the cloth, there—and in a faint, looking as if she was dead herself."

"Miss Kendall was in the Turkish room?" asked Silvers.

"Yes, sir—if that was her name. She was in there hiding, most like, for he had to call twice before he saw her."

"And nobody else was here?"

"Only Mark, from the men's room. He came when I did!"

"Well," said Silvers slowly, "if that is all you can tell us, go back to your post, and send in Mark. But, remember—not a word of this to any one!"

"No, sir," she answered, nodding, and passed out.

"This is bound to be awkward for Miss Kendall if it has to go to the police," said Silvers, as the door closed behind her.

"Unpleasant—that's all. But beastly unpleasant! I can testify that she was here only a second before she screamed. She had just left me, you see, and I was waiting on the stairs for her!"

"But your testimony—" said Silvers, with a shake of his head. "You love her. You'd lie for her!"

"If need be," admitted Garry, simply.

"But it will not be necessary. We'll find the murderer!"

"I hope so," said Silvers.

At that moment Mark knocked, and they admitted him.

"Now, Mark," said Silvers, "we know that you came in here when Miss Kendall screamed—and saw what immediately followed. What we want to know is, if you saw anything or heard anything before Miss Kendall screamed—anything, I mean, that might throw a little more light on the case!"

"Well, sir," said the boy slowly, "I saw Mr. da Costa come up!"

"When was that?" asked Garry eagerly.

"About five minutes before I heard Miss Kendall scream."

"Only five minutes before?" repeated Silvers.

"It couldn't have been much longer," said Mark. "It was just after he finished his dance. I happened to be standing at the door of the men's room listening to the music. He came up, looking kind of white, and met a lady on the stairs, and stopped to talk to her. She was going down just as he was coming up, and they stopped to talk. It looked like he didn't much want to talk to her, but she kind of hung on to him by the lapel of his coat. I didn't hear what she said. Da Costa looked up at me and frowned, and I went in."

"So you didn't see whether the lady went downstairs again or came up here with Da Costa?" asked Garry quickly.

"No, sir—I didn't!"

"You didn't come to the door again?"

"No, sir! Not until I heard the scream!"

"Did you recognize the lady?"

"No, sir!"

"But you can describe her, surely! You can tell us what she looked like!" cried Silvers.

"Well, sir, she had—she had a kind of a nice face—big eyes—and—a very low-cut dress—and hair cut short."

"What color was her hair? What color was her dress?" asked Garry impatiently.

The boy hesitated in some embarrassment; then he looked up to meet their anxious eyes.

"I don't know," he said. "You see—I'm color-blind!"

CHAPTER VII.

DEAD LIPS TELL NO TALE.

SILVERS and Garry looked at each other in some exasperation. Then Garry said patiently:

"Still—you would know her again if you saw her—wouldn't you?"

"Yes—I guess so," Mark admitted slowly. It was plain that he was far from certain. Apparently, he was not as observant as he might have been in respect to feminine charms—or else the particular lady in question had not entirely appealed to him.

"Well, suppose you try?" suggested Silvers. "Go down to the supper room and have a look about. If you see the lady there, dancing, or sitting at one of the tables, let us know."

"I'll go with him," said Garry, "if you'll wait here!"

Silvers hesitated.

"You see," explained Garry calmly, "this boy may be implicated in this affair! In fact, it is just possible that he killed Da Costa himself—and that he invented the story of the lady on the stairs to mislead us!"

At this the boy turned white, his jaw dropping, his eyes almost popping out.

"My God, Mr. Silvers, you don't believe that!" he gasped.

"No," Silvers assured him; "but it is a possibility, as Mr. Carpenter points out—so you had better try hard to locate that woman!"

"I will!" exclaimed Mark, and he started off with Garry, leading the way with a most determined air.

When they reached the supper room, however, the lights were down again, and two negro boys were dancing. They were from the colored show that had that season taken the town by storm, and they had been engaged as a sort of special attraction to do their sensational turn here. The calcium lights that had been trained upon Da Costa and his partner a little while before were now trained on them, as they shuffled

and shook and stepped about with amazing celerity and verve.

Garry and the check-room boy waited until the dance ended and the negroes came back for their encore. This time they sang instead of dancing, and Garry beckoned Mark to follow him to the balcony, where the man who managed the calcium lights was stationed.

There, in Silvers's name, he confiscated one of the lamps, and while the electrician kept the negroes covered with one white spotlight, he switched the other upon the tables, turning it this way and that, so that Mark could see every one within its scope. The guests thought it was part of the program, and laughed and shielded their eyes, or tried to sit motionless and proudly unheeding as the light struck them. And the negro performers were too old at their game to so much as look surprised. Accordingly Mark was able to study the various groups unobserved, and his survey was soon rewarded.

"That's the woman—there—with the fan and the band of diamonds on her head," he cried excitedly, pointing. Following with his glance the direction of Mark's outstretched finger, Garry saw Joan Olcott. Leaning forward with a fixed, expectant, almost fascinated glitter in her eyes, she was intent upon the maneuvers of the negroes; something in her responding to the wild savagery in their every move and tone. He thought of Salome. There was something about her that reminded him of the evil, passionate, abandoned creature who had become enamored of the Baptist—and danced for his head.

She was very pale—almost ghastly white, with lips that were too full and too crimson. Her mouth was cruel. Her eyes were too large and too intense. Her black hair, cut short, was so thick that it stood out crisply about her head, held in place from the crown to the forehead by a circlet of diamonds. She wore a gown of orange-colored chiffon, and had rubies in her ears.

Too vivid—too brilliant—she looked as she leaned there across her table, with gaze fixed upon the gyrating negroes. Her nostrils quivered as she breathed.

Come' Let us go'" said Garry.

They returned to the supper room, and from the doorway Garry sent Charlie to summon the woman.

"Tell her a gentleman wants to speak to her about Guy da Costa," he said. Charlie nodded.

"Any new developments yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," answered Garry regretfully.

Charlie started on his way through the tables; Garry dismissed Mark and waited. The other man who was waiting—Bartlett—cowering behind his palms in the far corner of the room, studied Garry thoughtfully. He had been observing the crowd closely—unceasingly—since his return to his table; and he had wondered about Garry's exits and entrances.

Had the police been notified? Had they arrived? Did they find any clews?

These questions tortured him. He would have liked to ask them, but this was manifestly impossible. He was not supposed to know what had happened in that little French drawing-room upstairs. He must not even suspect there was anything wrong. Nobody else in those crowded rooms seemed to suspect. He must be as gay and careless and frivolous as they.

But it was hard to do that—with the wound in his side still bleeding.

He had tried various postures to strive to close the wound, but it was a vertical gash, which his sitting position kept open. If he could only lie down for a bit so that the edges would come together and permit the blood to congeal! But he could not lie down. He had to sit there—drinking his champagne—smoking his cigar—smiling—and watching, listening, waiting for the approaching footsteps of the police.

He had already placed a second napkin over the first, against the wound. The first was saturated. But the blood stain did not yet show above his waistcoat. Although the stain had spread, it had spread all the more slowly for his cleverness in placing the napkins there.

A waiter — his waiter — came by, eying him. He summoned a smile and ordered more champagne.

From the Colemans' table Katherine, too, watched Garry with anxious, hopeful

eyes. Deep within her, somewhere, she was aware of an agony of pain, now—an endless aching. But it was very far down. She was keeping it hidden away down there by the force of her will. But she knew that it was there, waiting to force its way up and overwhelm her—the instant that she was alone. However, she was able to smile, in spite of it. She was able to chatter about nothing—to jest—to flirt.

It was very strange to her—that she should be sitting there, playing a part as though she were an actress in a play. And knowing all the time that this was not she—as she *would* be.

She had to struggle constantly against the mad desire to rise and pound the table and scream: "Listen—all of you! There is a dead man upstairs—and they think I killed him!"

The desire to tell all the world about the dead man was—at times—almost irresistible! It was only by thinking of Garry's steady gray eyes that she could control it.

The thought of Garry gave her strength—confidence. He was so cool, so absolutely safe and sane and dependable. She felt suddenly very tired, and wanted to creep into his arms and rest. But—the lights went up; the negroes bowed themselves out of view; the band struck up another popular number; and smiling, Katherine got up to dance.

Meanwhile, holding her ermine coat carelessly about her, Joan Olcott crossed the floor and found Garry in the hallway beyond. There was a vague look of anxious expectancy in her strange eyes.

"You sent for me? You've something to say to me—about Guy da Costa?"

"Yes," he answered quietly. "Will you come upstairs a moment, please?"

"Is that necessary?"

"Yes."

Her frown deepened, but without further question or protest, she followed him. He threw open the door to the little French drawing-room for her.

She passed in. And as her glance flashed from Silvers—round the little room—she saw the covered body. By some strange instinct she sensed that it was he. She stif-

fened. White faced, her lips parted, her eyes staring, she stood regarding it. Her bosom stirred violently under her gasping breaths.

"Guy—*Guy?*" she whispered, through dry lips. Her eyes sought Garry's for confirmation.

"Yes—*Guy!*" he admitted quietly. "What do you know about it?"

He threw back the cover—and she screamed—hoarsely, in agony. It was dreadful—the most dreadful cry they had ever heard—the shriek of a soul in torment.

"My God!" she cried, then, dropping on her knees beside him. "Murdered!"

Her lips just framed the word. She bent over him—touched him—as though to make sure that she was really seeing this! Then—for an instant—she was motionless.

Garry touched her shoulder and urged her to rise, while Silvers restored the white covering. She got up mechanically.

"Guy," she whispered, as though to herself, "dead—murdered—and only a half hour ago—or less—he *spoke* to me!" She looked at Garry. "It isn't true! I can't believe it! It *can't* be true. I can't *realize* it!"

"You don't know who could have done it?" asked Garry.

She gazed toward the covered figure again—startled.

"Of course," she murmured. "Somebody has done it. Somebody killed him!"

Here was relief for her pent up feelings—here was an outlet for the violent passions that strained at their bonds within her.

"Whoever it is—we'll find him!" she cried, with clenched fists and blazing eyes. "We *must* find him—do you hear? I'll give every cent I've got to bring him to justice!"

"Have you any idea who he is?" asked Garry, studying her.

She hesitated—looked up, frowning.

"No," she said slowly; "no, though it might be half a dozen. Men who are jealous of him. Or women he has trampled underfoot." There came a strange brilliance into her eyes; her red lips smiled, scornfully. "All are not like me," she added.

ed. "He struck me—and I kissed his hand. He left me—and I begged him to come back. Why? God knows. He never loved me. He never made me happy. He just—used me and laughed; but I was never happy until he came into my life. I haven't been happy since he left me."

Great tears welled up into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"You and Da Costa danced together, once—did you not?" asked Garry casually.

"Yes. When he first came to New York, after the war. He was still in uniform when I met him. Do you remember how handsome he looked in his uniform? I was mad about him from the first, and I offered him the job—just to keep him near me. I didn't know, then, what a wonderful dancer he was."

"You danced on one of the roofs, did you not?"

"Yes—but only for a few weeks. Mr. Milburne—who was interested in me then—compelled me to give it up. I wanted to give *him* up instead, but Guy wouldn't let me. Guy was not so prosperous in those days, and Mr. Milburne's generosity is well known. Guy and I went on seeing each other anyway—until Mr. Milburne found it out. Somebody told him. I've always thought it was Mable."

"Mable?" repeated Silvers.

"Yes—Mable Scott."

"The little red-haired girl who's dancing with him here—or was!" put in Garry.

"Yes. She had just begun to dance with him then—and she was keen on him—as most women are. Mr. Milburne quit me; and when he quit, Guy quit. Mable annexed them both. You see, I don't kid myself. He never cared a hang for me—it was just Mr. Milburne's bank roll! While I controlled it, Guy stuck to me. When Mable got her hands on it, Guy began to get chummy with her. He never stopped to think that I'd given up just about everything I had for him. He never thought about anybody but himself."

Her tone was bitter; her eyes glistened with unshed tears.

"Isn't it the limit," she went on brokenly, "how a woman will sacrifice everything for a good-for-nothing like Guy—and snap

her fingers at the men that—that are really decent and on the level?"

Garry nodded.

"And yet, knowing just how worthless he was, you still cared for him?" he asked.

"Cared for him," she repeated, looking at him. "I loved him so much that I wanted to die when he left me. I never took to drink or dope until then. I've never loved anybody else in my life but Guy. I loved him so much that—there aren't any words to say it. It burned in me! It drove me crazy! *Men* never love as much as I loved him."

Garry leaned forward, fixing her with his eyes, and seized her wrist.

"You loved him enough to *kill* him!" he cried sternly.

"Yes," she answered without flinching. "And I would have killed him, too, only some one else did it first. I wish to God it had been I! Oh, to feel that knife going into his throat! To make him cringe and suffer! To wipe that accursed smile off his face. If it had only been I! If it had only been I!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITTLE GIRL IN GREEN.

HIS eyes held hers; she did not seek to evade his glance.

"Well," he said gravely, "whether it was you or another we shall soon know, for I believe that nothing happens in this world that is not led up to by a sequence of events; and these events are links in the chain that bind the murderer with his victim. You can't efface these events. You can't destroy a single link in the chain. They are unalterable. And sooner or later—they are sure to be disclosed."

"Links in the chain," she repeated meditatively. "That is true, isn't it?" And she turned from him to the covered body in the corner, and then back again. "So, one cannot escape the consequences of one's misdeeds, can one? There is really no past—no future. There is just one long uninterrupted present. No break. No wiping out and beginning again. No new start. It's hard—this world. Isn't it?"

"It is what one makes it," said Garry. She shrugged and reddened her lips—repaired the damage to her eyelashes—the havoc her tears had wrought. She studied herself in the tiny mirror of her vanity box. And suddenly she laughed, her laughter ringing hard and bitter in that tiny room.

"Even now I think of appearances. As though it mattered how I look—whether any one fancies me or not! Inside—I'm burned out. There is an emptiness that you cannot even conceive of. Because my world revolved around him. I thought only of him. All my plans included him. To win him back—to make him care—to hold him. And you thought I might have done this to myself—robbed me of everything."

She laughed again—the laughter giving place to sobs; and then she buried her face in her arms and gave way to her violent overwhelming grief. Both men stood helpless, awed by it!

The moments lengthened. Gradually the force was spent. She raised her head.

"Well?" she gasped, finally, looking at them.

"You spoke to Da Costa a few moments before his death," said Garry; "out there on the stairs!"

"Yes!"

"What did you say to each other?"

She drew a long breath with difficulty.

"I begged him to come back. He was annoyed and said he would not. He said he had other plans. He said I must be a fool not to realize that he was bored with me. And he asked me please not to annoy him again. He was brutal—*hateful!*"

"And you?"

"I lost my temper. I told him he couldn't use me and then dispose of me so easily. I told him I would pay him back for everything. Then he laughed, and said he didn't want to seem rude, but he had a good deal on his mind, and for me to write it out and mail it to him. With that he left me and came in here and slammed the door."

"What did you do then?"

"I went back to my table."

"Did you tell any one what had happened between you and Da Costa?"

Her eyelids quivered slightly.

"No," she answered, looking right at him. But something in her manner—some subtle change from her previous attitude—aroused his suspicions instantly.

"You are not telling me the truth," he cried.

"I am! Why should I tell any one? Whom should I tell such things?"

He debated.

"Who else is in your party? Who else is with you here?" he asked.

"Moffat Fielding," she answered reluctantly.

"Moffat Fielding?" he repeated, vaguely, trying to associate the name with some half-forgotten facts.

"The son of Jim Fielding, of Toledo," put in Silvers.

"Ah—yes," cried Garry, brightening. "He married some Follies girl—and his father chucked him out!"

"Yes—Dolores Lorraine. But they're not living together any longer."

"I know. She got tired supporting him. What is he doing now?"

"Bootlegging," answered Silvers, before the girl could speak; "and selling dope, I think."

"You can't bring a boy up the way he's been brought up—giving him everything he's ever wanted—letting him go his own way, always, and then throw him out into the world to shift for himself. He does the best he can," cried Joan fiercely.

"So he's a friend of yours," said Garry.

"A friend? Not exactly," she answered grimly. "We don't have many friends in our class of society. Some of us just find ourselves on the same level and hang together, that's all. Fielding's a rotter. At least that's what *you'd* call him. I just call him weak and badly started off. A lot of us aren't what we could have been if we'd got off to the right start. But it's a lot easier to go down hill than up, and some of us just haven't got the natural strength or character to climb. I haven't. Neither has he, and that gives us a kind of fellow feeling. We can be ourselves with each other, and that's rather a relief."

"So you told Moffat Fielding how Da Costa had treated you," said Garry.

She looked at him—shrugged.

"Yes," she admitted, yielding. "I told him. I was so full of it I had to tell some one! I was burning up inside! But he didn't do it! Don't waste your time hounding *him!* Better question Mable!"

"You don't like Mable, do you?" said Silvers.

Joan smiled.

"Not much," she answered coolly. "I guess I envy her. You see, I can't figure things out in my head—things that would be best for me, and then go ahead and *do* them—no matter who is hurt by them—no matter what damage they cause. Mable can! She can shut her eyes to everything but Mable's best interests. She hasn't a real feeling or a real emotion in her. I'm different. But I'm no fool. I see how much further Mable gets with her system. And I envy her because I can't kill the heart in me and play the game the way she does."

"And you think Mable may know something about this?"

"She might. It seems more likely than that Moffat would do it—just to avenge me. You see, he doesn't love me. We're just pals!"

"But—you are disposed to protect him, aren't you?"

"Yes. The maternal instinct in me—damn it!"

Garry smiled.

"Well, there can be no harm in my having a little talk with him, can there?"

"No-o—only that he's—I mean it's a shame to subject him to this sort of inquisition. He won't stand it the way I have! He's got nerves!"

"I'll be easy on him," promised Garry. And turning to Silvers, he added: "Will you go and ask him to come up? Say Miss Olcott wants him!"

"Let *me* go!" cried the girl anxiously.

"No—please. You see, for the sake of clearing this matter up quickly, we must make it absolutely impossible for you to warn him or advise him. It's for his own sake—to help establish his innocence!"

"Yes, I see," she agreed, sighing.

Silvers left the room. Joan sat moodily gazing into space.

"I hate to think of to-morrow—and all the to-morrows to come," she said slowly, "without *him* in them—or any hope of his coming back. They are going to be so-empty! They were empty enough before he turned up—but I did not know then how wonderful days and nights could be. You see, I had never really cared for any one before—*this* way! But now—I know—and I don't know how I am going to face them! I don't know how I am going to endure them."

"But he was so unworthy," said Garry.

"Yes, I know. But—that doesn't make it any easier. I tried to think of that when he left me. It didn't help. You don't care whether they are worthy or not when you feel this way. It's a curse! I wish to God it were *I* lying there now—dead—and he were here alive and well in my place! It's easier to die than to live. It's over quicker."

Garry said nothing. He was thinking of Katherine—and wondering if Guy had meant anything like this to her—wondering what there had been in the man to inspire such devotion. And his heart ached for her—laughing and dancing, down below, as though nothing had happened.

In the silence, lengthening between them, Silvers threw open the door and ushered Fielding in.

He was a young man, very handsome. That is, his features were finely modeled—almost too finely; his hair was very fair, and brushed until it shone; his mouth sulked; his lashes were quite long and surprisingly dark in comparison with his fair hair. Handsome, he was—but weak-looking. And now he looked quite nervous and helpless as his eyes wandered from Garry to Joan.

"Moffie!" cried the girl impulsively, responding to his look of anxious entreaty. But Garry cut in.

"Fielding," he said sternly, "I regret to inform you that a man has been murdered in this room to-night, and we sent for you—"

He got no further. Again Fielding's eyes flashed from Joan to the covered body on the floor, and his face growing pale as death, he cried out:

"I know! It's Guy da Costa! But she didn't do it! It was the other one—the pretty one—the little girl in green!"

"Moffie—for God's sake!" cried Joan. "You don't know what you're saying!"

"Don't I?" he responded, taking hold of the back of a chair for support. And his voice came slowly, clearly, with great deliberation. "I am saying that Katherine Kendall killed him! *I saw the whole thing!*"

CHAPTER IX.

HEAVY, HEAVY HANGS OVER HER HEAD.

THREE is something reckless, something abandoned, something lawless and barbaric about jazz. Under the spell of it, Katherine found herself getting on very well, laughing, swaying, flirting devilishly. There was color flaming in her cheeks now, and her eyes danced—those strange eyes of hers that had a trick of changing color with the gown she wore. They had been blue-black at dinner, half closed, languorous. They were green, now, and had odd lights in them.

Like the lamp that flares up with added brilliance just before it burns out, she was shining with a radiance that had never been hers before—but it was a radiance that had a new daring in it.

Stuyvie Nettleton, who had known her for years, and had never been particularly attracted to her—he preferred the more naughty and generous beauties of the region west of the avenue—came up to-night to beg for a dance; and as she nodded and danced off with him—for to-night she refused no one—he whispered in her ear, his lips brushing her cheek.

"What is it? You were a bud until to-night! To-night you have bloomed into a rose—a tea rose with a crimson heart—and a sweetness that is simply overpowering!"

She smiled.

"To-night," she whispered back mysteriously, "I have come to realize how imminent death is—and that life is short—and I have been wasting time."

"So now you are going to live?" he asked, his heart beating faster.

"Now I am going to live," she repeated trembling. She was wondering how much time there would be left her—after the inquiry in that room upstairs was finished—wondering if she would be dragged through the hideous publicity of investigations, a public trial—and she thought of the sleeping draft that she had obtained from the old family doctor after endless persuasion and the employment of all of her wiles—that sleeping draft that he had warned her might prove fatal if she took too much.

But Nettleton had not the vaguest conception of the dark thoughts that flashed behind her reckless glance. Holding her closer, until he could feel the wild beating of her heart against him, he breathed with difficulty.

"There is so much that I could teach you—about living," he whispered.

"Is there?" she asked, leading him on.

And the music throbbed, and screamed, and beat wildly. It was easier to be quite mad to music like that.

"You see," he went on boldly, "I have lived so much longer than you. I have sought for happiness along so many roads. I can save you a lot of vain pursuits. And all of my experience is yours to command!"

"It must be the glamour of hell he feels about me," thought Katherine, but she did not say it: instead, she said:

"Strange—you have known me almost since childhood, and you have never asked me to dance before!"

"You have never been like *this* before," he answered. "Until to-night you have been a pretty child. To-night, you are a woman, palpitating with life and the joy of living, thrillingly alive and real, human—my kind. I have often vaguely felt that *this* side of you must exist and might be brought out; but I have never had energy enough to try experiments. So I just waited. And now—some one else has tried—and succeeded. If it was Guy da Costa I shall be grateful to him forever."

His name turned her cold. She could not answer.

"Not that it matters," went on Nettleton suavely. "All that concerns me is—that some one has wakened the sleeping beauty—with a kiss. And she wants more

kisses. Her lips plead dumbly for them. Her eyes beg for them."

His clasp tightened, his cheek brushed hers. She was stifling—felt she must collapse in another moment if that screaming, beating, vibrating jazz went on.

And then young Coleman cut in. He was still young enough to hate the older man and all that he represented—money without toil or effort—success with many women, not one of whom had really cared—a flippant view of all that was really worth while in life—the perfection of everything that didn't matter and nothing that did.

"May I break?" he asked, politely, coldly, meaning more than that he wanted to finish the dance with Katherine.

It would have been against all ethics to refuse, but Nettleton yielded her up unwillingly. Katherine, as she changed partners, was conscious of an inner feeling of relief; but her face in no wise betrayed her. She smiled after the departing Nettleton, and called "Thanks"—she smiled up at young Coleman and murmured:

"Well—this is nice!"

And she thought that it *was* nice—there was something distinctly nice about this boy who was trying so hard and so awkwardly to be a man. He looked almost grotesquely clumsy, dancing—as most college boys do—but he was really very light and very graceful—and guided perfectly.

"I wish we could go home," he said suddenly, after dancing for several moments in silence.

"Why?" asked Katherine curiously, looking up at him.

"I don't know!"

"Aren't you having a good time?"

"Not very," he answered frankly. "There's something wrong. Guess I'm feeling kind of 'down' to-night."

She wondered whether he sensed the thing that was hanging over them—the dead man in the room upstairs—the pursuit of the murderer—the awful danger that was overshadowing her. He did not seem like a sensitive type who might sense such things.

"You're on the crest of the wave, all right—aren't you?" he added presently.

"Oh, yes," she answered, "I'm having a whirl!"

"I wonder," he said gravely. "It seems that way. But—"

"But what?" she gasped, staring.

"I suppose I'm an ass. But I feel as if—underneath—you're not so happy!"

"Funny boy!" she murmured, nestling closer.

"If I can do anything. You know!" he said. "The usual hero stuff. If ever you should need a friend—"

"Nice boy," she whispered.

And then—Stanton Wilcox cut in. And the jazz went on and on and on—and men and women danced and drank and smoked, and laughed and whispered together. And Bartlett, behind his screen of palms, looked on alertly, through eyes that burned somberly out of a gray, set face.

CHAPTER X.

ACCUSATION FLIES FROM LIP TO LIP.

UPSTAIRS, Silvers and Garry were staring at Fielding in frank amazement.

"Do you realize what you're saying?" cried Garry. "Do you mean to say that you saw Miss Kendall kill Guy da Costa?"

"Yes," answered Fielding, "that's exactly what I mean!"

"No, no!" protested Joan Olcott. "Don't believe him. He isn't responsible—really. He couldn't have seen such a thing! He was downstairs—with me—at my table! Besides—he has taken a dislike to Miss Kendall ever since Guy has been interested in her—and when Moffie dislikes any one—he'll stop at nothing."

Fielding remained quite calm through all this—and smiled.

"I know what I saw," he said, as Joan ended.

"How did she kill him?" asked Garry, then.

"How?"

"Yes—in what way—with what sort of weapon?"

Fielding's eyes wandered swiftly toward the covered body; there was nothing there to give him a hint. He parried.

THE DANCE OF DEATH

"I can't say exactly how," he said. "All I know is—I heard him cry out, 'My God, you've done for me!' and I heard her say, 'I meant to! I thought it all out! It's only what you deserve!'"

"If this is true," said Silvers, "it was deliberate, premeditated murder! Do you understand that, young man? This testimony of yours is liable to send a young girl to the chair!"

"That's what I heard," he reiterated stubbornly.

"I tell you he isn't responsible! He's under the influence of drugs," protested Joan. "He always is. He has a habit of telling the most unlikely tales—and swearing to them. It isn't that he intends to lie, really. He believes them himself. His imagination plays tricks with him. I tell you, *I know him!*"

"How is it that you heard all this and still didn't see how the murder was done?" asked Garry.

"I was hiding," answered Fielding.

"Where?"

His eyes wandered.

"In the other room," he answered.

"Why didn't you interfere—or make some outcry afterward?"

"I didn't want to get drawn into it—on Joan's account!"

"So? And what happened after Miss Kendall said that it was only what Da Costa deserved?"

Fielding hesitated.

"I don't know. I heard him fall. Then I sneaked out of the other door and went back to my table!"

"What other door was that you sneaked out of?" asked Garry.

"The door to that room in there!"

"But there is no door to that room in there," said Garry quietly.

"No door?" he repeated.

"Only that one that you see. No door to the corridor outside!"

Fielding looked confused.

"I told you he didn't see anything or hear anything," put in Joan. "He was with me—at my table—all the time!"

"Don't keep *saying* that!" he cried furiously, turning upon Joan. "Can't you see they want to make *you* the goat? And

they will, too, if you don't look out! I don't care whether there's another door or not! I don't remember how I got out! I only know she killed him—Katherine Kendall. *She killed him!*"

He bit at his finger nails; his eyes shifted warily from Silvers to Garry, and there was a defiant, hunted look in them.

"Come, now—why do you want to implicate her?" asked Garry quietly.

"She killed him. Nobody else. *She did it!*"

"God bless me, I believe he's saying all this to clear me," gasped Joan, laying her hand on Fielding's arm and turning him round toward her. "Are you, you foolish kid?" she added more gently. "It isn't at all necessary, you know. And think of that poor girl if they believe your tale—think of the fix she'll be in!"

"Bah! She's got money! You can get away with anything in this town if you've got money!" he muttered. "There'd have cops in here long ago if *I'd* been suspected!"

"You see," said Joan, simply, turning to the others, "he just made all that up to shield me. He's a regular guy, all right! He'd come through!"

Fielding straightened up a bit with pride.

"You said it," he admitted.

"You mean—you *did* invent that story?" asked Garry.

He looked at Joan; she nodded encouragingly.

"Sure," he mumbled, somewhat sheepishly, and dropped his head.

Silvers and Garry drew a long breath of relief.

"Can you beat that?" asked Joan.

"Well, I thought maybe you *did* do it," he explained, "and I didn't want to see you arrested—you'd have a hard time to get off! I knew the Kendall girl wouldn't! And I guess she had cause enough to want to kill him—same as the rest of us that knew him. Not that I have it in for the Kendall girl—but she was the only one I could think of on the spur of the moment! Her name just popped into my head."

He looked up anxiously at the others.

"It's right—what she said," he added, indicating Joan with a jerk of his head.

"I didn't leave her table. I don't know anything about it at all!"

Garry leaned forward, fixing the boy with his eyes.

"Did she leave the table—Miss Olcott?" he asked.

"No, she didn't leave, either—until you sent for her!"

"But I did! You know I did, Moffie!" she protested. "I came up to the ladies' room to powder my nose. That's when I met Guy on the stairs," she explained, turning to the others.

"Oh, yes—*then* you did," said Fielding. It was plain he cared nothing for the truth; he thought only of shielding Joan.

"Do you realize that you are liable to get in very wrong with the authorities if you persist in evading the questions and deliberately falsifying?" asked Garry sternly. "Do you want to be held for perjury? Or as an accessory after the fact?"

He sneered.

"I'm not afraid," he said. His bravado was superb.

"Don't be foolish, Moffie! We've nothing to fear—either of us," said Joan. "Tell them whatever they want to know—frankly!"

He looked at her.

"Sure—if you want me to," he said, graciously.

"I do," she assured him.

"Well?" he said, then, turning impatiently to Garry. "Fire away! What is it?"

"You knew Guy da Costa pretty well, didn't you?"

"Too damned well," he answered grimly. "You know that old song, don't you—'He Made Me What I Am To-day.' That's the bird. I met him in the service—Royal Flying Corps. I was just out of college, then. Hadn't graduated—just quit to enlist. Didn't even drink, then. I had my first drink with him. 'What the hell,' he said, 'we'll all be dead in six months! Let's whoop 'er up while we've got the chance.' And maybe we didn't whoop 'er up! Gambled, drank, took dope! Gee, the pace we went in France! It'd have been all right if we had got smashed up at the finish. But we didn't! And when we

came back—well—I just didn't want to settle down again, that's all. Family tried to make me, but I couldn't! I'd got kind of used to it all, d'you see?"

"I guess they never did understand him much," said Joan, as Fielding halted. "Any more than my family understood how to handle me. Families, you know, are to blame for a lot of things. Not that they mean to be! Not that they don't try their damnedest! But—we're not all alike—are we? And they don't understand!"

"It wasn't as if I'd been a hero," said Moffat Fielding. "I just wasn't much of anything—but a rotter—from the start!"

"Did you see much of Da Costa—after you both came back?" asked Garry, then.

"Yes, I saw him all the time. I introduced him around some. He didn't know many people here then. When he got himself fixed in right, he shook me! At first, when I wanted to go back home, he used to laugh at me and say, 'Hell, you went to France and fought the damned Boches, didn't you? You saved the country for them. Have a good time while you're young! There's time enough to settle down!' My mother used to write for me to come home. She sent money regularly—still does. But I'm ashamed to go back, now!"

"And while you were going about with Da Costa, you knew most of his friends, I suppose?"

"All of them, I guess," answered Fielding.

"Perhaps you can help us, then, to single out one or two who might be capable of a deed like this—and who had sufficient motive?"

Moffat Fielding thought for an instant.

"Who knows what any one is capable of? I don't know what *I'm* capable of myself. As for murder—I guess almost any one might do it—given reason enough. And nearly all of Da Costa's friends had plenty of reason. You see, he just couldn't play fair. Never did with any one. I was his 'buddy' and he didn't with me. You're going to have a hard time finding the murderer that way!"

"It begins to look like it," admitted Silver to Garry.

But that's the only way we can possibly do it, since there seem to be no clews," said Garry.

"No clews?" repeated Fielding, glancing again toward the covered body.

"A wallet with some bills in it and visiting cards," said Silvers, shrugging; "handkerchiefs and three keys. He was killed with one of my steak knives!"

Fielding looked up sharply.

"Three keys?" he repeated. "Well—they ought to lead to something!"

Garry and Silvers exchanged a glance.

"How so?" asked Garry.

"Why—one key probably unlocks the door of his apartment," said Fielding, "and the other two keys might open some chest or cupboard, there, that would reveal new evidence. Let's have a look at them!"

Silvers advanced toward the body again and threw back the covering. Joan turned aside. Fielding drew nearer, fascinated, gazing down in horror and loathing at the stiffening corpse. But the fat little man was too absorbed in saving himself from ruin to be upset by sentimental or superstitious considerations. He fumbled in the dead man's pockets and brought forth the flat leather key case with the three keys in it.

Fielding took the case gingerly and regarded the keys.

"That's his latchkey," he said, picking it out. "And that's obviously the key to some cabinet or strong box. And that"—he whistled—"that's also a front-door key! I wonder whose!"

CHAPTER XI.

ON A MISSION AT MIDNIGHT.

"I T'S going to be a delicate mission—entering Da Costa's apartments and searching his effects," said Garry slowly. "And yet I agree with Fielding, here, that it may be a swift and simple route to the identity of the murderer!"

"It's the *only* thing to do," agreed Silvers. "We're not making much progress here. At least, we haven't found out much so far, and it looks to me like we've gone as far as we can go!"

He looked thoughtfully from Garry to Joan and from Joan to Fielding.

"How about *your* going up there with Fielding *now?*" he asked Garry.

"Now?" repeated Garry, hesitatingly.

He was loath to leave the King of Clubs while yet the mystery remained unsolved; loath to leave Katherine in such jeopardy.

"Sure, *now!*" insisted Silvers. "We've got to go through with this investigation as far as we can go by ourselves—so long as we've started! And we haven't got any too much time left before the guests will be wanting the doors opened! I'd be in a hell of a fix with the cops if I couldn't turn over the murderer to them when I call them in to take charge of the body—and I'm not intending to get into any more trouble than I'm in! When I open those doors at day-break, I'm going to hold *somebody* for this murder! I've got to—that's all!"

He stood over the body of Da Costa—a sinister little figure—and looked down at it. The body was still uncovered—and a ghastly sight it was. *Rigor mortis* had begun—the jaw had dropped—the eyes had set and were staring glassily.

"Somebody killed this chap!" he said grimly. "Somebody in this house to-night. We've found two people who *might* have done it. Miss Kendall—and Miss Olcott, here! Maybe they're both innocent! I don't know! But you can go gamble on this: If I haven't got any more conclusive evidence by dawn, I'm going to turn both these women over to the police!"

The others stared at him. Garry and Fielding were speechless; Joan caught her breath with a little smothered gasp.

"Now, you're in this to save the Kendall girl," he went on, turning to Garry, "and you're trying to save Joan Olcott," he added, to Fielding. "Well—you can both go to Da Costa's rooms together—and look about! If you find evidence there that'll settle this thing fine! If you don't—you'll come back and say so, because I'm going to hold both women here till you come back! And meanwhile, you'll kind of watch each other!"

The eyes of the two men met, appraisingly, challengingly.

"This thing is no game to me, see?" said

Silvers. "It's damned serious—and I mean every word I'm saying! I'm not going to be ruined if I can help it! I'm going to get out from under, no matter who has to face the music! That's that!"

"Will you give me your word you won't proceed against either of these girls until we get back?" asked Garry quietly.

"Yes!"

"Do you think we can get into Da Costa's apartment without any difficulty?" asked Garry, then, turning to Fielding.

"Sure," answered Fielding confidently. "I've been there hundreds of times. They all know me around there!"

"All right," said Garry. "Let's go!"

And to Silvers, he added: "How do we get out?"

"Not the front way," answered Silvers. "That might attract too much attention. You know Guy arranged that *nobody* was to be let out on any account before daylight! God knows why he hit on that idea—but it was just crazy enough to catch 'em—and it's certainly turned out fine for us—now that *this* has happened!"

He indicated Da Costa's body with his foot.

"Fortunately," he went on slowly, "we got a few private exits—planned 'em in case of trouble with these revenue agents—and one of 'em'll come in handy now. This way."

They turned to follow Silvers out of the little French drawing-room.

"May I go back to my table?" asked Joan, with an uneasy glance toward the corpse.

"Yes—and wait there until further notice," answered Silvers rather gruffly.

But young Moffat Fielding took her by the shoulders and looked straight into her eyes.

"And don't worry—trust me," he said. "I'm going to see you through!"

She smiled, with tears in her eyes, and left them. The thunder and swing and beat of the music downstairs lent her strength as she passed once more into the smoke-filled, noisy supper rooms. And as she crossed the floor, her eyes met those of Katherine Kendall, who was swaying in the arms of Huxley Reed. But there was

no flash of recognition nor of understanding. Though their positions to-night were so nearly alike, they were dwellers in different worlds.

Below, around a bend in the stairs, Silvers swung back a huge mirror that slid easily and noiselessly on grooved tracks, and revealed a narrow iron stairway, leading downward. The night air—cool and damp—blew in upon them as they stood on the little platform landing. They buttoned their coats and put on their hats.

"There's a door at the bottom that opens outward at the slightest shove," said Silvers; "but you have to have a key to open it from outside. Here's the key!"

Garry took it.

"When you come back, come in this way," added Silvers. "I will be looking out for you!"

"And you will do nothing until we return?" inquired Garry again.

"Nothing!"

The mirror slid back into place, shutting them out. Garry in the lead, they started downward, in silence.

There was no moon visible in the overcast sky—no stars were out; and a cold wind blew, with the hint of coming rain in it. A dismal night, strangely suitable, Garry thought, to the things that were happening.

The unreality of it all held his attention. If—a few hours before—he had been told these things might occur, he could never have conceived it possible. To come in contact with murder—with mystery—with all the things one reads about in the newspapers and never vaguely associates with oneself or one's own kind! It was incredible—and yet—true—hideously true!

That Katherine—of all girls—should be caught in a web like this. Katherine, so dainty, so delicately reared, so carefully bred—so sheltered—so guarded. In spite of her willfulness—her recklessness—she was so innocent, so young and fresh and really so unspoiled. And to think that by this time, to-morrow, the world might be gazing at her pictures in the newspapers—linking her name with Da Costa's—discussing the murder and her possible guilt.

It was a maddening thought. He put it from him with a desperate effort for calmness.

"Here we are!" cried Fielding, shoving open the door at the bottom of the steps, and they stepped out into the street. The stairway had been placed along the side of the building, shielded from view from the street by a kind of grilled-iron wall. The main entrance was just around the corner.

"We'll find taxis in front," said Garry.

They started briskly, each man fired with the burning desire to end the situation and save a woman.

"The Odillon," called Fielding to the chauffeur, who stepped out to solicit patronage as they approached the stand.

Apparently he knew the building—as what chauffeur in town did not. The Odillon, on Park Avenue, was one of the latest, most exclusive, most expensive apartment houses in the latest fashionable section. Only motion-picture magnates or popular song writers or new war-made millionaires could afford to live there. It was built of granite and marble, and furnished with the *objets d'art* wrested from ravished France and Italy. The staff of attendants and servants had come *en masse* from the Continent of Europe.

"So Da Costa afforded the Odillon," said Garry, with a grim smile. "He did himself well!"

"Oh—always," answered Fielding. "There was very little he denied himself in the way of pleasure or comfort. If his was a short life, it was certainly damned merry!"

"But he didn't exactly spread peace and comfort about him as he went," observed Garry.

"No—not exactly!"

The cab drew up at the entrance to the Odillon, and they descended. A very pompous and impressive lackey in maroon and gold livery received them just inside the huge doors of the entrance hall.

"I want to go to Mr. da Costa's apartment," said Fielding.

He said it somewhat determinedly and a little defiantly, for he felt it quite within the bounds of possibility that they would be refused admission. It was certainly un-

usual for guest to present himself as during the absence of the host, and let themselves in with his latchkey. However, Fielding and Garry were prepared to demand permission to enter—even to accomplish their entrance by force if necessary. But force was not necessary.

"Yes, sir," said the dignified doorman. "Mr. da Costa left word that anybody who called was to be admitted."

They followed a second lackey to the elevator, pondering this.

CHAPTER XII.

PULSATING LOVE LETTERS.

THE elevator-man opened the door and directed them to an apartment on the twelfth floor of the building; slamming the door and vanished. Garry and Fielding looked about them.

"Evidently somebody is expected here," said Garry, "or Da Costa would not have left orders like those!"

"A woman, most likely," answered Fielding, with a shrug. "In any case, it's nothing to do with us—or our mission here!"

He inserted the key in the lock, and opened the door. There was stillness within. A night light was burning dimly in the hall, and by its light they advanced without being challenged.

"His valet leaves after he is dressed for the evening," volunteered Fielding. "Never stays at night! Gets here in time to bring him his coffee in the morning."

"The chances are there's nobody here, then," said Garry.

"Most likely not!"

Garry thereupon turned on the lights. And he whistled with astonishment as his eyes wandered over the rooms. They were handsomely decorated, and in perfect taste; a man's rooms, the dwelling place of a man of cultivated tastes and more than ordinary accomplishments. That is—the living room and dining room and foyer were. The bed chamber, which he did not see until afterward, was rather different.

"He got them furnished," said Fielding, "or else had some decorator in."

Garry picked up a book that was lying on the small table near the davenport.

"Nietsche!" he exclaimed, and then smiled. "With the pages still uncut," he added.

Fielding moved to the hearth and beckoned for Garry to come and see. In the open grate some one had been burning photographs and letters. Quite a heap of them, half destroyed, lay there—grim testimony to Da Costa's extensive acquaintance among the fair sex. Not a personal photograph had been left about.

"What do you make of *that*?" asked Fielding.

"Looks a little as though some one had been here before us," answered Garry. "And yet—who could have known of the murder. The doors were locked. No one—except ourselves—has left the club."

"But the murderer—knowing what he was about to do—might have come here first," suggested Fielding.

"That's true," admitted Garry. "But, in that case, it must have been a premeditated thing—carefully planned. It didn't seem like a deliberate, cold-blooded killing!"

"Is there any use in our looking for evidence here?" asked Fielding.

"Why not look—so long as we are here," said Garry. "The most careful person sometimes overlooks *something*!"

Fielding shrugged—and went round the grand piano that stood in the window niche with a Chinese embroidery over it and a bowl of orchids on top—strange orchids of a rare species, colored with reds and yellows. There was a small carved cabinet, half hidden away there.

"My guess is that the key fits this," he observed.

But the cabinet proved to be without a lock—and empty. Along the further wall were bookcases, but the key to them was sticking in the lock.

"Let's try the bedchamber," suggested Garry, leading the way. And he smiled as he crossed the threshold.

There was a huge, low sleeping couch, piled with innumerable pillows of different colored silks. There was a torchlike lamp on each side of the bed, and a canopy over

it. Tapestries, gay-colored stuffs, and embroideries lined the walls; with here and there a nude of the modern French school, or a black and white, after Beardsley. A small marble statuette of a shepherd boy, piping, stood in the window, bathed in moonlight from out of doors, and in an amber glow from the hanging lamp above him. Across from him stood Da Costa's desk—locked. And the second key that Fielding had fitted it.

"It will be empty," Fielding predicted as he inserted the key in the lock. "Some one has already been here to cover traces!"

"No harm to look," said Garry.

And then the desk opened under Fielding's hand—and it was not empty. Directly in front stood a picture of Katherine—a beautiful picture—with "Yours, K." scrawled across the bottom of it in her big, careless hand. And beside the picture lay a little stack of letters—in the same hand—four letters addressed to Guy da Costa. There was nothing else to be seen.

"Katherine Kendall," breathed Fielding triumphantly, "and some of her letters. I guess they're evidence in the case!"

"I guess not," answered Garry, reaching for them; but Fielding was before him.

"What's the idea?" he cried, turning to look up at the older man.

"I'll take those," said Garry, without directly replying. His jaw was squared.

"Oh, you will, will you—and let Joan face the music with the cops? I guess not. They go back to Silvers!"

They eyed each other in open antagonism, now—each man fighting for the woman he loved. Fielding still sat before the desk, his hands closed over the letters; Garry stood over him.

"I don't see that this has anything whatever to do with the murder," said Garry calmly. "She was interested in Da Costa! Well—we all know that! Half the town knows it! She wrote him letters! Well—is that going to add anything to the knowledge we already have? Letters are such intimate personal things. I don't like the idea of having hers paraded before the public gaze!"

"Because you are in love with her," said Fielding gruffly.

~~"Perhaps."~~

"Well, I am to live with Joan. And I'm just as anxious to clear her as you are to clear Katherine Kendall. These letters may do it!"

"Nonsense," protested Garry: "they can't have anything to do with the murder, I tell you!"

"Exactly. You tell me; but you don't know any more than I do about it! Suppose we read them and see!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



A SPRIG OF MYRTLE

THREE is a bed of myrtle by the house—
It is the flower of memory, they say—
She set it gayly there, a gay young bride—
It blossoms there for strangers, now, to-day!

Yes, strangers now are living where she dwelt.
There in the house to which she came, a bride—
Love in her eyes, and roses at her belt,
Her young, adoring mate, tall, at her side!

And, oh, she needs to pass it every day,
As to her little cottage she goes by!
Above the stranger voices, glad and gay,
Does she, I wonder, hear her first born cry?

Do well remembered voices call to her,
The laughing voices of her vanished brood,
As she goes by? And does she wince to see
The strangers in the doorway where she stood

To give her mother's kiss to each in turn.
When each had learned, in turn, to say farewell?
The door she softly closed, at last, one day
Upon the past that she had loved so well!

Do figures that her eyes alone can see
Walk down the garden paths and bend above
The flowers that had known her tender touch,
Had blossomed to reward her care and love?

Does she remember? Who of us can say?
We marvel as we see her passing by,
For she goes gallantly upon her way,
And ever walks erect, with head held high!

And always on her lips there is a smile,
But once I saw her, when no one was by,
Pause at the gate uncertainly a while,
Then slowly turn and enter haltingly!

But, once within, she swiftly sped to where
The myrtle bloomed—a moment there caressed
Its blossoms! Then she rose, without a tear,
And passed—a sprig of myrtle at her breast!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery.

*[Read them] what Garry. "Read to
ers addressed to somebody el-*

"It's either that—or turn them over.
We came here to get any information that
we could about Da Costa's affairs—and
we've got some! You don't suppose I'm
going to let you destroy these *unread*, do
you?"

Garry drew a long breath.

"Very well. We'll read them," he
agreed. He held out his hand for them.



The Adventures of Peabody Smith

By WILLIAM J. FLYNN,
Former Chief, United States Secret Service,
and GEORGE BARTON.

II.—THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY.

IT did not require big headlines in the morning newspapers to give the Vernon Colfax case a sensational aspect. The facts were sufficient to start the buzz of scandal in business and social circles, and for more than the proverbial nine days it was one of the wonders of little old New York.

He was reported to have taken one of the Hudson River steamers—it was the night boat to Albany—and was assigned to room thirteen on the starboard side of the vessel.

During the night some one heard terrible groaning, and later there was a loud splash on that side of the steamer. In the morning they found his room empty and a hardly decipherable scrawl which intimated that he was "tired of it all" and expected to "end" his misery in short order.

The family was well-known, and at one time exerted considerable influence in the community, but for years it had been running to seed. Vernon was generally looked upon as the black sheep of the family, al-

though if the truth be known very few of them were snow-white. Naturally, the steamboat episode caused the wagging tongues to work overtime, but if they were surprised at the story of the reported suicide, the astonishment turned to shocked amazement when it was announced that Vernon Colfax had taken out a life insurance policy for fifty thousand dollars just a year and a day before the episode of room thirteen on the Hudson River steamer.

In view of all these facts Peabody Smith was not surprised when he received a message asking him to call on Richmond Williams, the president of the Harrison Insurance Company. Leaning back in his leather-covered chair, the veteran insurance man told the detective that while they were perfectly willing to pay all just claims, they wanted to make sure that the Colfax case came within that category. He said they wanted a thorough investigation made of the case, and if Smith would assure him that the claim was legitimate the beneficiary would receive his check without further ado.

"Technically, I suppose," he remarked, stroking his white mustache, "we might insist upon the production of the body of the deceased, but we do not intend to go that far. Absence of fraudulent intent, and proof of death will satisfy all of our requirements."

Peabody Smith listened carefully and said little. He knew that the company had been swindled in the past, and he was also aware that a sense of personal vanity prevented President Williams from acknowledging that fact. Also, he sensed a feeling of disappointment on the part of the business man. Smith's fame had preceded him, and the insurance expert expected to see an altogether different person. Peabody looked anything but the conventional detective. He resembled neither the detective of fact or fiction. He was not a miracle man, nor was he the awkward investigator who is supposed to typify the real sleuth. He was just himself.

He was well-dressed, but so inconspicuously that President Williams, ten minutes after he left, could not remember what he wore. He had on a dark suit of clothing, fitted to the season, and wore a violet in his buttonhole.

What the head of the ~~insurance company~~ did know was that Peabody Smith was the chief of detectives in one of the large cities; that he had been an Indian fighter in his native town; that he had served for twenty years in the United States Secret Service; that he had an honorable record in the Bureau of Investigation in the Department of Justice, and had been an officer in the Intelligence Bureau of the War Department during the world imbroglio. He asked a few pointed questions and then rose to go. He smiled at the business man in his sad way.

"As I get it, Mr. Williams, you are tired of having your company swindled, and you're willing to go the limit to prevent it in the future."

"But," said the other, "I didn't say this was not a legitimate claim. And I said nothing about the past."

"Quite true, but I know, because it's my business to know what has happened in the past. My scrapbooks cannot talk, but they often tell me things that are useful in my profession. You need not apologize for what you are doing. My favorite author will tell you that. Josh Billings says very truly that the man who gets bitten twice by the same dog is better adapted for that kind of business than any other."

When Peabody Smith left the room, Richmond Williams had a better opinion of him than when he entered.

That night the detective spent several hours in reading up on the Vernon Colfax case, and when he had concluded he had fully digested all that had appeared in the newspapers. The first thing in the morning he called upon Ralph Colfax, the last of the family and the beneficiary of the insurance policy. He knew in advance a great deal about that branch of the clan.

To begin with, they were not connected with those of the same name who had made such an impression upon the public life of the country. But having the same name they had benefited by the similarity. Their parents had died early, and the two sons had continued living in the old family home, which was in the lower section of the city, almost surrounded by business houses. The boys existed like Indians. Domestic life,

as it is known in most well-regulated homes, was unknown there. They slept there, and that was all.

Peabody found Ralph Colfax at home, and the surviving member of the tribe received him with a certain rough-and-ready courtesy. The detective presented himself as a representative of the insurance company, and said that his purpose was to ascertain the facts concerning the death of Vernon Colfax. He lit a Pittsburgh stogie and handed one to his host, and that little move established a fellowship at once.

"As I understand it," said the detective, "you were with your brother on this unfortunate trip?"

"Yes," replied the other, "but there isn't much to add to what has already been published. It's not a pleasant thing to say it, but Vernon has always been the black sheep of our family. He left home suddenly about a year ago. I believe that he went to South America, but I am not sure of the details because he was always reticent about himself and his personal affairs. All that I know is that he went away unexpectedly and—"

"That," interrupted Peabody, "was just after he had taken out the insurance policy in your favor."

"It was not in my favor," was the prompt retort, "and I don't know why you make such an intimation. It was made out to his heirs."

"But you are the only remaining heir?"

"Well, yes," was the grudging assent, "if you want to put it that way."

"Pardon me for interrupting you," said the detective in a pleasant voice, but with an unsmiling face, "go ahead with your story."

"Well, Vernon came home about a week ago and he seemed to be in pretty bad shape. He was a nervous wreck. I wanted him to see a doctor, but he wouldn't listen to the suggestion. He lay around the house like a man who was tired of life."

"You didn't send for the doctor, you say. Did any one else see him?"

"Yes," was the reluctant reply, "Miss Fordson called here one evening and spent a few minutes with him."

"And might I ask why Miss Fordson called to see your brother?"

"Miss Amelia Fordson," replied Ralph, with the patient air of an adult who is trying to instruct a child, "is an old friend of the family. At one time she expected to marry Vernon, but there was never an actual engagement between them. He began to go wrong, and although she has always been very friendly and sympathetic, the idea of their marriage became more and more impossible."

"So when she heard that he was home, after a long absence, she was naturally anxious to see him," suggested Peabody Smith.

"Exactly. Yet it might have been better if she had not come. The effect upon both of them was bad. She left in tears and he was a nervous wreck. He said he couldn't stay in the city any longer; that he had to be on the move. It was then that I suggested the Adirondacks. The trip up the Hudson on the Albany boat was only the first part of the journey."

"You were to go with him?"

"Certainly. He wasn't fit to go alone. Events have demonstrated that. I tried to get adjoining rooms, but that was impossible, and we were on different sides of the boat. On the morning of the departure I had a lot of little details to look after, and I sent Vernon on ahead in a taxicab. Maybe that was a mistake, but he reached the boat all right and lay down in his berth at once. After that he refused to leave his stateroom. I carried his meals to him, but he scarcely ate anything. But when I left him on that fatal night he seemed more composed than he had been at any time since his return home. The rest you know. The next morning we found his room empty. The man who had the adjoining cabin heard him groaning during the night, heard his door open around twelve o'clock and then heard the splash as though a body had been thrown overboard."

The detective nodded his head solemnly and sat for some moments in reflective silence.

"Mr. Colfax," he said presently, "what sort of a looking man was your brother?"

Ralph rubbed his chin and gazed into space, as though he were trying to conjure up a picture of his dead relative. When he spoke it was with deliberation.

"He was of medium build, had dark hair and a dark mustache. But I can't say that he had any peculiar characteristics. By the way, here's a picture of him."

He walked to the other side of the room, followed by the detective. On the wall hung a photograph of two young men. They were Ralph and Vernon Colfax. It was taken when both of them were at their best. Peabody looked intently at the picture of Ralph and then at the reality in the flesh. The counterfeit presented a manly, robust fellow. The original showed marks of dissipation in every line of his countenance. His face was puffy and his eyes were sunken and underscored with dark rings.

"You look very much alike in that photograph," remarked Peabody. "Might I ask if you were twins?"

"No, there were two years between us, Vernon being the younger. But I believe there was a strong family resemblance. Now, Mr. Smith, I've told you all I know and I beg to be excused. If the Harrison Insurance Company wants to get the reputation of fighting just claims, I'm ready for them. I'll get the best counsel in New York and give them a battle they'll remember."

"Who said anything about contesting the claims?"

"Why, you—I—well, what are you here for if it is not for that purpose?"

"My dear Mr. Colfax," rejoined the old man soothingly, "this is a big claim and we are at least entitled to reasonable proof of death."

"All right," was the stubborn reply, "I'll see that you get it."

II.

PEABODY SMITH smoked dozens of Pittsburgh stogies during the next twenty-four hours, and Tim Burke declared that he drank enough English breakfast tea to float a battleship. But Tim always talked in exaggerated terms. Yet the old man was doing a lot of thinking, and he sat by the hour reading *Josh Billings* and wrinkling his brows until the crow's feet around his eyes seemed to be multiplied by the hundreds.

In the meantime he made a careful ex-

amination of the stateroom on the Hudson River boat that had been occupied by Vernon Colfax. Nothing had been disturbed. There was a bottle of medicine and some pills in a box. His shoes were under the berth, and his bathrobe hung on a hook behind the door. A book lay face downward on the berth, as though he had been reading before he reached his tragic decision. Peabody shuddered, not at the thought of the tragedy, but at the idea of any one treating a book in that fashion.

Captain Harcourt, of the steamer, was not able to shed much light on the mystery. He said that he was on deck when the man arrived. He was bundled up as a sick man was apt to be, wore a long overcoat, green goggles, and walked with the aid of a cane. He spoke in a querulous voice and swore when he was told that his brother had not yet come. He went to his room at once and remained there. The other details, as related to the detective by Ralph Colfax, were confirmed by Captain Harcourt.

That afternoon Peabody called upon Amelia Fordson at her apartment on West Ninety-Fourth Street. She was a cultured woman who, without being rich, had always been in good circumstances. The detective contrived to gain her interest at the outset, and she readily answered his questions. She knew all about the incident of the Hudson River boat, or at least had read about it in the newspapers. She shook her head sadly.

"I'm not at all surprised," she admitted, "and all that I can do is to feel intense regret that such a promising young man should have had such a sad ending."

"I'm told," said Peabody gently, "that you called on him a few days before this unfortunate occurrence."

"Yes," she replied. "I had not seen him in years, and you can imagine my surprise when I was called on the telephone and heard his familiar voice."

"He called you himself?"

"He did, and asked me if I would not come and see him for old-times' sake. I knew that it would be an ordeal, but I could not find the heart to refuse. I'm sorry now, because I would have liked to remember him as he was in the good old days—a handsome, manly, bright boy."

"You found him changed, then?"

"Greatly. He was alone in an armchair in the sitting room. He kept the shades down, saying that the light hurt his eyes. He looked positively ghastly—like an old man, in fact. He seemed to have aged twenty years in the few that had passed since we met. He said little, but held my hand, as if he did not want me to go. After that he grew nervous and hysterical, and I felt that it was wise to leave him. The next thing I heard was this dreadful story about the Albany boat."

"Did you ever hear where he went when he left the city unexpectedly?"

"Never definitely, but it was my belief that he went to the Argentine. In my short visit we had no opportunity of talking about his trip."

Peabody Smith was very thoughtful after he left Miss Fordson. He stopped at the office of one of the steamship companies, and also made some inquiries at the railroad offices. When Tim Burke, his assistant, met him that evening the old man was engaged in going over a mass of time-tables.

"What's the matter, boss?" he asked.
"Getting ready for a vacation?"

"I don't know whether you'd call it a vacation," responded Peabody, grimly; "but I start for Buenos Aires to-morrow."

The veteran did not go away for rest and relaxation, and yet he managed to combine pleasure with business. When he reached the lively capital of the Argentine he was in the right mood to pursue his investigations. His fame had preceded him, and he found the police officials eager to assist him in his quest. It was several days before he was able to trace the movements of Vernon Colfax, and in the meantime he made it his business to haunt the streets of the community, admiring the skyscrapers and the up-to-date methods of the most important city in South America.

In less than a week he had located some men who knew Colfax when he was living in Buenos Aires, and a day later he found a young woman who had been one of the admirers of the castaway. It was in the older and the quainter part of the city that Peabody Smith made the acquaintance of Mercedes Runyon, and when she found

that he was interested in Señor Colfax, there was nothing that she was not willing to tell him.

They sat on the balcony of a white-washed brick house. The lattice work around it was covered with creeping flowers, and off in the distance they looked down upon a beautiful rose garden. The girl talked of love in a low, tender voice that made the detective experience twinges of conscience as well as of sentiment.

"To know Señor Colfax," said the girl softly, "was to love him. There was no thought of marriage between us, and yet I would have married him at any time if he had asked me. He drank, alas, more than was good for him. But always he was the gentleman. He was so romantic, too. One night nothing would do but that he should have a heart tattooed upon his right arm. That, he said, was to always be a reminder of me."

Filled with these reminiscences, Peabody called on the local police the next morning and was given a most astonishing bit of information. They, too, had traced the American, and they found that he had been drowned two years before. The sad-faced detective scratched his sparse hair and tried to puzzle out the mystery. How could Vernon Colfax be drowned from a Hudson River steamboat six weeks ago if he had died in Buenos Aires two years earlier?

"Are you sure about the date?"

"As sure as we can be about a matter that will never be entirely cleared," was the reply.

It seems that on or about the date mentioned the steamship Bolívar had taken a party of excursionists on a trip along La Plata River. That stream is subject to sudden and violent gusts of wind. On this occasion a storm broke with unexampled fury and a score of the passengers were lost. Vernon Colfax had been on the Bolívar, and it was generally believed that he was among the missing. Some of the bodies were recovered, and that of the American was identified by a brother who was said to have come from New York. But there were no official records of this, and Señor Smith would have to rely on word of mouth for his proof.

THE ADVENTURES OF PEABODY SMITH.

Peabody was not the kind of man to show emotion, but he had difficulty in restraining himself at this announcement. He made it his business to have another meeting with Mercedes Runyon on the flower-covered balcony. The girl did not know what had become of Vernon Colfax. He had left suddenly without telling her where he was going. She recalled the disaster of the Bolivar, but never dreamed that he was on that boat. With so many bodies that were never identified, it was not surprising. Peabody left without enlightening her. This was indeed a case where ignorance was bliss.

He returned to the United States with the problem unsolved, but with much food for thought. His first call was at the office of the Harrison Insurance Company. President Williams had heard of his trip to the Argentine, but he was frankly disappointed when he learned that the Colfax case was still in the lumber room of unexplained mysteries.

"Ralph Colfax was in here yesterday," he said, "and he raised a regular row. He says that if he does not receive a check for fifty thousand dollars within three days, he's going into court. Ordinarily I would not mind a threat of that kind, but Colfax has a sharp lawyer who has been waiting to get a shot at us for years, and if he does, I'm afraid that he will give us the kind of advertising we are not seeking. He hasn't a thing on us, but you know we pride ourselves on making payment twenty-four hours after death, and this thing has now run into the second month."

Peabody Smith never looked more like a funeral director than he did at this moment. His face was the personification of unrelieved sadness. He spoke in melancholy tones.

"He gives us three days, does he? Well, my guess is that two days will serve our purpose. That is unless all of my plans go to smash. Now, while I'm here, I would like to have an interview with the doctor who examined Vernon Colfax when he took out this policy."

Dr. Hendricks was in his office at the time, and he was only too glad to talk to the detective about one of the most impor-

tant policies that had been issued by the company. Peabody Smith sat down in the armchair that was offered him and kicked up his legs with the air of a man whose whole object in life is his personal comfort. When he spoke it was with that deliberation that was so disconcerting to those who were not familiar with his mannerisms.

"Doctor," he began, "in view of the size of this policy I suppose you gave the applicant a pretty thorough examination?"

The physician bristled up in the attitude of one who finds himself on the defensive.

"I personally examined Vernon Colfax," he replied, "and I found him to be a pretty good risk. If I hadn't I wouldn't have recommended the issuance of the policy."

"Just so," commented the detective in the style of a cross-examiner. "And just what did you find his condition to be?"

"Almost normal, I should say. The man was not perfect physically when I saw him. He gave evidence of having dissipated, but in spite of that his heart and lungs were in number one condition."

"What kind of a policy did he take?"

"The usual one, I think. There was one clause in it which said payment should not be made if death was caused by suicide within one year after it was issued."

"And Vernon Colfax jumped overboard just a year and a day after that policy was handed over?"

"So I'm told. But I can't be held responsible for that, can I?"

"Presumably not. In making the examination, did you cause Mr. Colfax to strip?"

Dr. Hendricks laughed.

"I did. I remember that he protested against that at the time, but I told him it was usual in the case of big policies."

"Now, doctor, think well over this question. Did you notice anything unusual about the applicant's body? About his right arm, for instance?"

Peabody Smith leaned forward as he put this query. The crow's feet were thick about his gray eyes. There was anxiety in the grave face. He waited for the answer with manifest impatience. Dr. Hendricks, on his part, took his time in replying. When he spoke it was with great positivity:

"Yes, there was one unusual thing for a man in his station in life. I noticed that his right arm was tattooed."

Peabody Smith relaxed. He fell back in his chair with a sigh of relief. The strained look left his face. He had the answer he expected, and he smiled. And as he smiled his whole countenance lit up with the same effectiveness that comes when a light is struck in a dark room. He paused for a moment, then he put another question that was intended to clinch the first.

"And will you tell me what object was tattooed on his arm? Do you recall that?"

"Oh, yes," answered the doctor, now fully restored to good humor. "I don't think I could ever forget that. It was an anchor."

The unexpectedness of this puzzled the detective. It put the case back to where it had been in the beginning.

"Now, doctor," he said, persuasively, "don't you think your memory has failed you? Don't you think the object that was indelibly printed on his arm could have been a heart?"

"No, I don't," was the sharp retort of a man who was in danger of losing his temper. "If you think I'm not capable of telling the difference between an anchor and a heart, then I'm not fit for my job."

Peabody Smith had to be satisfied with that, and he left the office and went to his apartment and indulged in a session with Josh Billings. It was his theory that the wit and wisdom of the phonetic humorist always had the effect of sharpening his mental faculties. His sense of momentary defeat soon passed away, and when Tim Burke called an hour later he found the old man in fine fettle.

"My boy," he cried, "I'm going to wind this case up to-morrow—just twenty-four hours before the time limit that has been fixed by Ralph Colfax. It's as clear as noonday to me now. I only need one little link to complete the chain of evidence. Maybe I'll get it and maybe I won't. At all events, I'm going to stake everything on a single throw of the dice."

"I'll bet on you," replied the faithful one, "and I'm shocked to hear you use the language of the gambling fraternity."

"You needn't be," was the calm retort, "because life itself is a gamble, and the man who takes the biggest chances usually gets away with the biggest pot."

III.

PEABODY SMITH was at the office of Richmond Williams at ten o'clock the next morning. The president of the insurance company greeted him warmly and hoped that he had found what he wanted.

"Not yet," was the cheerful retort; "but I'll eat my shirt if I haven't got it before the clock strikes twelve!"

As they talked, a messenger brought in a card stating that Ralph Colfax wanted to see Mr. Williams. The president glanced at the card and frowned in perplexity. Smith caught sight of the name and exclaimed:

"Good; nothing could be better. Bring him in and we may be able to expedite the matter."

Ralph Colfax entered with a frown upon his dissipated face. He glanced from one to the other.

"I'm tired of being jockeyed by you two," he exclaimed, "and if I don't get my money right away there'll be trouble in this town."

"Colfax," cried Peabody Smith, "you're nothing but a bluffer, and you know it! If I were Mr. Williams I'd take you by the seat of the trousers and fire you out of the office!"

The bland president was surprised at this language. He didn't like it at all. As for Ralph Colfax, it produced exactly the effect that had been intended by the detective. He turned on Smith hotly:

"He can't do that, and neither can you."

The sad-faced detective took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. The two men looked at him in amazement. He spoke to Colfax with spirit:

"Take off your coat and get down to business. I'm twenty years older than you, but if I can't trim you in one round I'll tell Mr. Williams to give you that check before you leave the room. Come on now and stop your bluffing."

Colfax squared off as though he pitied

the poor old man. He took his place in the corner all the room.

"No, no!" exclaimed Peabody. "Take off your coat and roll up your sleeves."

Ralph followed instructions reluctantly, but with an evident desire to satisfy this eccentric person. He tossed his coat on a chair and then rolled up his shirt sleeves. Peabody watched him with fascinated interest. As the operation was concluded, the detective let out a cry of triumph:

Ralph Colfax had bared his right arm, and imprinted thereon was the design of an anchor.

"You are my prisoner," shouted Peabody Smith. "I arrest you for trying to defraud the Harrison Insurance Company out of fifty thousand dollars!"

The man turned pale, and all of the life seemed to leave him. He dropped into a chair like a limp rag.

Tim Burke had entered the room, and he stood there beside President Williams, awaiting the orders of his chief. But Peabody did not seem to see either of them. He proceeded to address Ralph Colfax.

"You nearly got away with it, but that anchor sealed your doom. I suspected you from the start, but it was hard to make all of the little pieces dovetail. That was because there was so much truth in your fiction. It was true that Vernon went to South America, and when you identified him as the victim of the steamboat accident you first conceived the idea of making easy money by fooling the insurance company. You looked so much like your brother that you had no difficulty in impersonating him in the examination with the insurance com-

nany. And you had it made a little easier to overcome the medical exam. You bewitched Miss Fordson all right. Your trouble is that of your brother, and she thought it was Vernon who called her on the telephone. Then, by the aid of a bushes room and some clever make-up, you continued the hoax when she made her call."

"But," protested the prisoner feebly, "my brother went on the boat ahead of me."

"He did not," cried Peabody, "it was you who went on the boat, wrapped in blankets and well disguised. You changed to your real self in the cabin and then came out and circulated among the passengers and talked constantly to the captain of your sick brother in his bunk. You did the groaning that night, and you tossed the heavy stone overboard to imitate the body of a man going into the water. Also you left the evidence of the poor unfortunate in the cabin where it would be found in the morning. It was little Miss Mercedes Runyon, of Buenos Aires, who spilled the beans when she told me of how Vernon had tattooed the heart on his arm. And, of course, the fatal flaw was when you permitted the medical examiner to see that telltale anchor on your own arm."

"Ralph Colfax ought to have known better," said Peabody Smith to Tim Burke that night: "but men like him never seem to get wisdom. It always comes too late. Old Josh Billings described his kind when he said that experience was a school where some men learn what fools they have been."

Next Week: "THE CHALKED HAT."



NOVEMBER'S JEWEL

WHO first comes to this world below
 With dread November's fog and snow
 Should prize the topaz's amber hue—
 Emblem of friends and lovers true.



The Fire People

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Golden Atom," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RULER OF THE LIGHT COUNTRY.

HOWEVER pleased the newcomer was to see me, I had no difficulty in assuring him with equal truth that my feelings matched his. The first surprise of the meeting over, we took him to the living room, where Lua greeted him with dignified courtesy, and we all gathered around to hear his story.

He was, I saw now, not more than twenty years old, rather short—perhaps five feet six or seven inches—and powerfully built, with a shock of tousled red hair and a handsome, rough-hewn face essentially masculine.

He seemed to be an extraordinarily good-humored chap, with the ready wit of an

Irishman. I liked him at once—I think we all did.

He began, characteristically, near the end rather than the beginning of the events I knew he must have to tell us.

"I got away," he chuckled, grinning more broadly than ever. "But where I was going to, search me. And who the deuce are *you*, if you don't mind my asking? How did you ever get to this God-forsaken place?"

I smiled. "You tell us about yourself first; then I'll tell you about myself. You are the earth-man we've been hearing about, aren't you—the man Tao captured in Wyoming and brought here with him?"

"They caught me in Wyoming all right. Who's Tao?"

"He's the leader of them all."

"Oh. Well, they brought me here, as you say, and I guess they've had me about all over this little earth since. They stuck me in a boat, and Lord knows how far we went. We got here last night, and when my guard went to sleep I beat it." He scratched his head lugubriously. "Though what good I thought it was going to do me I don't know. That's about all, I guess. Who the deuce are you?"

I laughed.

"Wait a minute—don't go so fast. Start at the beginning. What's your name?"

"Oliver Mercer."

His face grew suddenly grave. "My brother was killed up there in Wyoming—that's how I happened to go there in the first place."

"Mercer!" I exclaimed.

He started. "Yes—why? You don't think you know me, by any chance, do you?"

"No, but I knew your brother—that is, I know Bob Trevor, who was with him when he was killed. He's one of my best friends."

The young fellow extended his hand. "A friend of Bob Trevor's—away off here! Don't it get you, just?"

Miela interrupted us here to translate to her mother and Anina what he said.

Mercer went on:

"The assumption is, you people here are not working with this gang of crooks I got away from—this Tao? Am I right in thinking so?"

"You're certainly right, that far," I laughed.

I felt, more than I can say, a great sense of relief, a lessening of the tension, the unconscious strain I had been under, at this swift, jovial conversation with another human of my own kind.

"Yes, you're right on that. This Tao and I are not exactly on the same side. I'll tell you all about it in a minute."

"Then, we're working together?"

"Yes."

"Well, all I'm working for is to get back home where I came from."

"You won't be when you hear all I've got to say."

He started at that; then, with sudden

change of thought, his eyes turned to Anina. The girl blushed under his admiring gaze.

"Say, she's a little beauty, isn't she? Who is she?"

"She's my sister," I said, smiling.

For once he was too dumfounded to reply.

Miela had finished her translation now, and, as she turned back to us, spoke in English for the first time during the conversation.

"Do you know why it is they brought you here from the Twilight Country?" she asked Mercer.

This gave him another shock. "Why, I—no. That is—say, how do you happen to talk English? Is it one of your languages here, by any chance?"

Miela laughed gayly.

"Only we three, in all this world, speak English. I know it because—"

I interrupted her.

"Suppose I tell him our whole story, Miela? Then—"

"That's certainly what I want to hear," said Mercer emphatically. "And especially why it is that I'm not supposed to want to get back to where I belong."

My explanation must have lasted nearly an hour, punctuated by many questions and exclamations of wonder from young Mercer. I told him the whole affair in detail, and ended with a statement of exactly how matters stood now on Mercury.

"Do you want to hurry back home to earth now?" I finished.

"Duck out of this? I should say not. Why, we've got a million things to do here."

His eyes turned again toward Anina.

"And, say—about letting those girls keep their wings. I'm strong for that. Let's be sure and fix that up before we leave."

It was not more than half an hour later when the king's guards arrived to conduct us to the castle. Meanwhile young Mercer had discovered he was hungry and thirsty. As soon as he had finished eating we started off—he and I, with Lua and Miela. The guards led us away as though we were prisoners, forming a hollow square—there were some thirty of them—with us in the center. We attracted little attention from passers-

by; the few who stopped to stare at us, or who attempted to follow, were briskly ordered away.

Occasionally a few girls would hover overhead, but when the guards shouted up at them they flew away obediently.

The king's castle was constructed of metal and stone—a long, low, rambling structure, flanked by two spires or minarets, giving it somewhat an Oriental appearance. Each of these minarets was girdled, halfway up, by a narrow balcony.

The first room into which we passed was small, seemingly an antechamber. From it, announced by two other guards who stood at the entrance, we entered directly into the main hall of the building. At one end of it there was a raised platform. On this, seated about a large table, were some ten or twelve dignitaries—the king's advisers. They were, I saw, all aged men, with beardless, seamed faces, long snowy-white hair to their shoulders, and dressed in flowing silk robes.

The king was a man of seventy-odd, kindly faced, gentle in demeanor. He bore himself with the dignity of a born ruler, and yet his very kindness of aspect and the doddering gravity of his aged counsellors, seemed to explain at once most of the trouble that now confronted him.

We stood beside this table—they courteously made way for Lua to sit among them—and all its occupants immediately turned to face us.

Our audience lasted perhaps an hour and a half altogether. I need not go into details. I was right in assuming that the king desired to help us prevent Tao from his attempted conquest of the earth. This was so, but only in so far as his actions would not jeopardize the peace of his own nation. He sadly admitted his error in allowing Tao's emissaries into the Light Country. But now they were there, he did not see how to get them out.

His people were daily listening to them more eagerly; and, what was worse, the police guards themselves seemed rather more in sympathy with them than otherwise. A slight disturbance had occurred in the streets the day before, and the guards had stood apathetically by, taking no part.

Above all else, the king stoutly protested, he would have no bloodshed in his country if he could prevent it.

In the neighboring towns of the Light Country—the nearest of which was some forty miles away from the Great City—the situation was almost the same. Reports brought by young women flying between the cities said that to many Tao also had sent emissaries who were fast winning converts to his cause.

"Do all these people who believe in Tao expect to go to our earth when it is conquered?" I asked Miela. "How can they—so many of them—hope to benefit in that way? Aren't they satisfied here?"

Miela smiled sadly.

"No people can ever be satisfied—all of them. That you must know, my husband. They have many grievances against our ruler. Many things they want which he cannot give. Tao may promise these things—and if they believe his promise it is very bad."

"He might come over here and try to make himself king," Mercer said suddenly. "If it's like that maybe he could do it, too, with this grand earth-conquest getting ready. Tell the king that—see what he says."

"He says that he realizes and fears it," Miela answered. "But he thinks that first Tao will go to your earth, and he may never come back. So much may happen—"

"So he's just going to wait," I explained. "Well, we're not just going to wait. Ask the king what our status is."

"Ask him about me," Mercer put in. "Are those Tao men going to grab me the minute I show my face on the street, or will he protect me?"

Miela translated this to the king, adding something of her own to which he evidently agreed.

"It is as I thought," she said. "He believes he can present you to the people as men of earth who are our guests, and that they will accept you in friendly spirit, most of them."

The king spoke to one of his advisers, who abruptly left the room.

"He will call the people now," Miela went on, "and will speak to them from the

tower—all who can leave their tasks to come. You will stand there with him. He will ask that we of the Light Country allow you to remain here in peace among us. And this captive earth man of Tao's"—she laid her hand lightly on Mercer's shoulder—"he will ask, too, that he be given sanctuary among us. Our people still are kindly—most of them—and they will see the justice of what he asks."

I suggested then that Miela tell the king that we had determined, if we could, to frustrate Tao in his plans; and showed her how to point out to him that such an outcome would, if successful, make his throne secure and insure peace for his nation.

He asked me bluntly what it was I thought I could do. The vague beginnings of a plan were forming in my mind. "Tell him, Miela, I think we can rid the Light Country of Tao's emissaries—send them back—without causing any disturbances among the people. Ask him if that would not be a good thing."

The king nodded gravely as this was translated.

"He asks you how?" Miela said next.

"Tell him, Miela, that there are some things that might happen of which he would be very glad, but which it might be better he did not know. You understand. Make him see that we will be responsible for this—that he needn't have anything to do with it or know anything about it. Then, if we do anything wrong against your laws, he will be perfectly safe in stopping and punishing us."

Miela nodded, and began swiftly telling this to the king. As she spoke I saw his eyes twinkle and a swift little series of nods from the aged men about the table made me know that I had carried my point. During the latter part of this talk I had noticed the growing murmur of voices outside the castle. The old man who had left the room at the king's order came back.

"The people now are gathering," Miela said. "In a moment we shall go up into the tower."

The king's councilors now rose and withdrew, and a few moments later the king, without formality, led the four of us through the castle and up into the tower.

We climbed a little stone staircase in the tower and came into a circular room some sixty feet above the ground. A small doorway from this room gave access to the narrow balcony which girdled the tower. The sounds of the gathering crowd came up plainly from the gardens below. We waited for a time, and then, at a sign from the king, stepped together upon the balcony.

The gardens below were full of people—gathered among the palms and moving about for points of vantage from which to obtain a view of the balcony. Most of them were men and older women. The girls were, nearly all of them, in the air, flying about the tower and hovering near the balcony, staring at us curiously. The women were, for the most part, dressed as I have described Lua.

The men wore knee-length trousers of fabric or leather, and sometimes a shirt or leather jacket, although a difference of costume that made evident the rank of the wearer was noticeable in both sexes. All were bareheaded, with the exception of the king's guards, who were thus plainly distinguishable, standing idly about among the crowd.

As we stepped out into view of the people a louder murmur arose, mingled with a ripple of applause. Three or four girls, hovering only a few feet in front of us, clapped their hands and laughed. The king placed Mercer and me on either side of him, and, standing with his hands on our shoulders, leaned over the balcony rail and began to speak.

A silence fell over the crowd; they listened quietly, but with none of that respect and awe with which a people usually faces its king.

Miela whispered to me. "He is telling them about your earth, and that you came here to visit us in friendly spirit."

There were some murmurs of dissent as the king proceeded, and once some bolder individual shouted up a question, at which a wave of laughter arose. As it died away, and the crowd appeared to listen to the king's next words, a stone suddenly came whirling up from below, narrowly missing the king's head. A sudden hush fell over the people at this hostile act; then a tumult

of shouting broke loose, and a commotion off to one side showed where the offender was standing.

Mercer wheeled toward me, his face white with anger.

"Who did that—did you see him? Which one was it?"

The king began to speak, as if nothing had occurred, and an instant later several more stones whistled past us. The commotion in the crowd grew more violent, but it was evident that a great majority of the people were against this demonstration.

"It is better we go inside," Miela said quietly.

The king was shouting down to his guards now, but they stood apathetically by, taking no part.

Another stone hurtled past us, striking the tower and falling at our feet. The king abruptly ceased his shouting and left the balcony. As he passed me and I glanced into his frightened face I felt a sudden sense of pity for this gentle, kindly old man, so well-meaning, but so utterly ineffective as a ruler.

I was about to pull Miela back into the room when a girl flew up to the balcony railing. As she balanced herself upon it I saw it was Anina. She said something to Miela, who turned swiftly to me.

"She is right, my husband. We must not leave the matter like this. They can have no confidence in you—our women most of all—if you do not do something now. A sign of your strength now would make them respect you—perhaps one of those who threw the stones you could punish."

I knew she was right. Most of the crowd was with us. If we retreated now, those against us would grow bolder—our appearance on the street might at any time be dangerous. But if now we proved ourselves superior in strength, the popular sentiment in our favor would be just that much stronger. At least, that is the way it seemed to me.

I did not need to ask Mercer's opinion, for at Miela's words he immediately said: "That's my idea. Just give me a chance at them."

He leaned over the balcony. "How are

we going to get down there? It's too far to drop."

Miela spoke to Anina, and they both flew away. In a moment they were back with two other girls. All four clung to the outside of the balcony railing, and formed a cross with their joined hands. Into this little seat of their arms I clambered. My weight was too great for them to have lifted me up, but they fluttered safely with me to the ground, landing in a heap among the people, who had cleared a space to receive us. As soon as I was upon my feet the girls flew back for Mercer, and in a moment more he was beside me.

"If we only knew who threw those stones," I said.

I stood erect, and my greater height enabled me to see over the heads of the people easily.

Miela laid her hand on my arm.

"One of them I know. His name is Baar, a bad character. He has caused much trouble in the past."

She then told me hastily that she and Anina would fly up and seek him out. Mercer and I were to follow them through the crowd on the ground.

The throng was pushing close about us now, although those nearest us tried to keep away as best they could. Miela and Anina flew up over our heads, and, side by side, Mercer and I started off. The people struggled back before our advance, striving to make a path for us. At times the press of those behind made it impossible for them to give us room. We did not hesitate, but shoved our way forward, elbowing them away roughly.

Suddenly, some twenty feet ahead of us, I saw Miela and Anina come to the ground, and in a moment more we were with them again.

The crowd was less dense here, and about us there was a considerable open space. Miela pointed out a man leaning against the trunk of a palm tree near by and glaring at us malevolently.

"That is he," she said quietly. "A very bad man—this Baar—whom many would like to see punished."

Mercer jumped forward, but I swept him back with my arm.

"Leave him to me," I said. "You stand here by the girls. If I need you, I'll shout."

The man by the tree was a squat little individual, some five feet three or four inches tall, and extraordinarily broad. He was bareheaded, with black hair falling to his shoulders. He was naked to the waist, exposing a powerful torso. His single garment was the usual knee-length trousers. I thought I had never seen so evil a face as his, as he stood there, holding his ground before my slow advance, and leering at me. His cheek bones were high, his jowls heavy, his little eyes set wide apart. His nose was flat, as though it had once been broken.

I went straight up to him, and he did not move. There were certainly three hundred people watching us as I stood there facing him.

"You threw a stone at your king," I said to him sternly, although I knew perfectly well he could not understand my words. "You shall be punished."

I reached out suddenly and struck him in the face as smartly as I could with the flat of my hand. He gave a roar of surprise and pain, and as soon as he could recover from my blow lunged at me with a snarl of rage.

As he came I turned and darted swiftly away. I heard a shout of surprise from Mercer. "It's all right," he called. "Wait."

I ran about twenty feet, then turned and waited. The man came on, head down, charging like a mad bull. When he was close upon me I gathered my muscles and sprang clear over his head, landing well behind him.

He stopped and looked around confusedly, evidently not quite sure at first what had become of me.

Mercer gave a shout of glee, and, to my great satisfaction, I heard it taken up by the crowd, mingled with murmurs of surprise and awe.

I stood quiet, and again my opponent charged me. I eluded him easily, and then for fully ten minutes I taunted and baited him this way, as a skillful toreador taunts his bull. The crowd now seemed to enjoy the affair hugely.

Finally I darted behind my adversary and, catching him by the shoulders, tripped him and laid him on his back on the ground. A great roar of laughter went up from the onlookers.

The man was on his feet again in an instant, breathing heavily, for indeed he had nearly winded himself by his exertions. I ran over to Mercer.

"Go on," I said; "show them what you can do."

The commotion of this contest had drawn many other spectators about us now, but they kept a space clear, pushing back hurriedly before our sudden rushes. At my words Mercer darted forward eagerly. His first move was to leap some twenty feet across the open space. This smaller opponent seemed to give the Mercutian new courage.

He shouted exultantly and dashed at Mercer, who stood quietly waiting for him at the edge of the crowd.

Mercer's ideas evidently were different from mine, for as his adversary came within reach he stepped nimbly aside and hit him a vicious blow in the face. The man toppled over backward and lay still.

I ran over to where Mercer was bending over his fallen foe. As I came up he straightened and grinned at me. "Oh, shucks," he said disgustedly. "You can't fight up here—it's too easy."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOUNTAIN CONCLAVE.

"IT is reasonable," Miela said thoughtfully. "And that our women will help as you say—of that I am sure."

We were gathered in the living room after the evening meal, and I had given them my ideas of how we should start meeting the situation that confronted us. We had had no more trouble that day. After the encounter in the king's garden Mercer and I had followed the two girls swiftly home. We were not molested in the streets, although the people crowded about us wherever we went.

"Why did none of Baar's friends come to his rescue up there in the garden?" I

asked Miela. "Surely there must have been many of them about."

"They were afraid, perhaps," she answered. "And they knew the people were against them. There might have been serious trouble; for that is not their way—to fight in the open."

Her face became very grave. "We must be very careful, my husband, that they or Tao's men do not come here to harm you while you sleep."

"Why do you suppose they ever happened to bring me here in the first place?" Mercer wanted to know. "That's what I can't figure out."

"They knew not that Alan was here," said Miela. "I think they wanted to show you to our people as their captive—one of the earth-men."

Mercer chuckled.

"They didn't know what a good runner I was, or they'd never have taken a chance like that."

I told Miela then my plan for enlisting the sympathy of the women of the Light Country and for securing the active coöperation of the girls in ridding us of the disturbing presence of these Tao emissaries.

We planned that whatever we did should be in secret, so far as possible. Mercer and I talked together, while Miela consulted with Lua at length.

I explained to Mercer that Tao might at any time send an expedition to invade the Light Country.

"How about that car we came from earth in?" he suggested. "He could sail over in that, couldn't he—if he should want to come over here?"

I knew that was not feasible. In the outer realms of space the balancing attractions of the different heavenly bodies made it easy enough to head in any specified direction; but for travel over a planet's surface it was quite impractical. Its rise and fall could be perfectly governed; but when it was directed laterally the case was very different. Just where it would go could not be determined with enough exactness.

Miela turned back to us from her consultation with Lua.

"In the mountains, high up and far be-

yond the Valley of the Sun," she said, "lies a secret place known only to our women. Our mother says that she and I and Anina can spread the news among our virgins to gather there to-morrow at the time of sleep. Only to those we know we can trust will we speak—and they will have no men to whom to tell our plans. To-morrow they will gather up there in the clouds, among the crags, unseen by prying eyes. And you and our—our friend Ollie"—she smiled as she used the nickname by which he had asked her to call him—"you two we will take there by the method you have told us. We will arrange, up there in secret, what it is we are to do to help our world and yours."

This, in effect, was our immediate plan of procedure. Nearly all the next day Mercer and I stayed about the house, while the three women went through the city quietly, calling forth all those they could reach to our conclave in the mountains.

They returned some time after midday. Miela came first, alighting with a swift, triumphant swoop upon the roof where Mercer and I were sitting.

One glance at her face told me she had been successful.

"They will come, my husband," she announced. "And they are ready and eager, all of them, to do what they can."

Anina and Lua brought the same news. When we were all together again Mercer and I took them to the garden behind the house and showed them what we had done while they were away.

It was my plan to have the girls carry Mercer and me through the air with them. For that purpose we had built a platform of bamboo, which now lay ready in the garden.

Miela clapped her hands at sight of it. "That is perfect, my husband. No difficulty will there be in taking you with us now."

The platform was six feet wide by ten long. It rested upon a frame with two poles of bamboo some forty feet in length running lengthwise along its edges. These two poles thus projected in front and back of the platform fifteen feet each way. Running under them crosswise at intervals were

other, shorter bamboo lengths which projected out the sides a few feet to form handles. There were ten of them on a side at intervals of four feet.

I found it difficult to realize the difference between night and day, since here on Mercury the light never changed. I longed now for that darkness of our own earth which would make it so much easier for us to conceal our movements. Miela relieved my mind on that score, however, by explaining that at nearly the same hour almost every one in the city fell asleep. The physical desire for sleep was, I learned, much stronger with the Mercutians than with us; and only by the drinking of a certain medicinal beverage could they ward it off.

It was after the evening meal, at a time which might have corresponded to an hour or so before midnight, that the selected eighteen girls began to arrive. Miela brought them into the living room with us until they were all together.

It was a curious gathering—this bevy of Mercutian maidens. They all seemed between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three—fragile, dainty little wisps of femininity, yet having a strength in their highly developed wing muscles that was truly surprising.

They were dressed in the characteristic costume I have described, with only a slight divergence of color or ornamentation. They were of only two types—jet black tresses, black eyes, and red-feathered wings like Miela; or the less vivid, more ethereal Anina—blue-eyed, golden-haired, with wing feathers of light blue.

When they had all arrived we went into the garden behind the house. In a moment more Mercer and I were seated side by side on the little bamboo platform. Miela and Anina took the center positions so that they would be near us. The other girls ranged themselves along the sides, each grasping one of the handles.

In another moment we were in the air. My first sensation was one of a sudden rushing forward and upward. The frail little craft swayed under me alarmingly, but I soon grew used to that. The flapping of those many pairs of huge wings so close was very loud; the wind of our swift for-

ward flight whistled past my ears. Looking down over the side of the platform, between the bodies of two of the girls, I could see the city silently dropping away beneath us. Above there was nothing but the same dead gray sky, black in front, with occasional vivid lightning flashes and the rumble of distant thunder.

Underneath the storm cloud, far ahead, the jagged tops of a range of mountains projected above the horizon. As I watched they seemed slowly creeping up and forward as the horizon rolled back to meet them.

For half an hour or so we sped onward through the air. We were over the mountains now. Great jagged, naked peaks of shining metal towered above us, with that broken, utterly desolate country beneath. We swept continually upward, for the mountains rose steadily in broad serrated ranks before us.

Occasionally we would speed up a narrow defile, with the broken, tumbling cliffs rising abruptly over our heads, only to come out above a level plateau or across a cañon a thousand feet deep or more.

The storm broke upon us. We entered a cloud that wrapped us in its wet mist and hid the mountains from our sight. The darkness of twilight settled down, lighted by flashes of lightning darting almost over our heads. The sharp cracks of thunder so close threatened to split my eardrums.

The wind increased in violence. The little platform trembled and swayed. I could see the girls struggling to hold it firm. At times we would drop abruptly straight down a hundred or two hundred feet, with a great fluttering of wings; but all the time I knew we were rising sharply.

Mercer and I clung tightly to the platform. We did not speak, and I think both of us were frightened. Certainly we were awed by the experience. After a time—I have no idea how long—we passed through the storm and came again into the open air with the same gray sky above us.

We were several thousand feet up now, flying over what seemed to be a tumbling mass of small volcanic craters. In front of us rose a sheer cliff wall, extending to the right and left to the horizon. We passed over its rim, and I saw that it curved slight-

ly inward, forming the circumference of a huge circle.

The inner floor was hardly more than a thousand feet down, and seemed fairly level. We continued on, arriving finally over the mouth of a little circular pit. This formed an inner valley, half a mile across and with sheer side walls some five hundred feet high. As we swung down into it I noticed above the horizon behind us a number of tiny black dots in the sky—other girls flying out from the city to our meeting.

I have never beheld so wild, so completely desolate a scene. The ground here was that same shining mass of virgin metal, tumbled about and broken up in hopeless confusion.

Great rugged bowlders lay strewn about; tiny caverns yawned; fissures opened up their unknown depths; sharp-pointed crags reared their heads like spires left standing amid the ruins of some huge cathedral. There was, indeed, hardly a level spot of ground in sight.

I wondered with vague alarm where we should land, for nowhere could I see sufficient space, even for our small platform. We were following closely the line of cliff wall when suddenly we swooped sharply downward and to the right with incredible speed. My heart leaped when, for an instant, I thought something had gone wrong. Then the forward end of the platform tilted abruptly upward; there was a sudden, momentary fluttering of wings, a scrambling as the girls' feet touched the ground, and we settled back and came to rest with hardly more than a slight jar.

Miela stood up, rubbing her arms, which must have ached from her efforts.

"We are here, Alan—safely, as we planned."

We had landed on a little rocky niche that seemed to be in front of the opening of a small cave mouth in the precipitous cliffside. I stood up unsteadily, for I was cramped and stiff, and the solid earth seemed swaying beneath me. I was standing on what was hardly more than a narrow shelf, not over fifteen feet wide and some thirty feet above the base of the cliff.

Mercer was beside me, looking about him with obvious awe.

"What a place!" he ejaculated.

We stepped cautiously to the brink of the ledge and peered over. Underneath us, with the vertical wall of the cliff running directly down into it, spread a small pool of some heavy, viscous fluid, inky black, and with iridescent colors floating upon its surface. It bubbled and boiled lazily, and we could feel its heat on our faces plainly.

Beyond the pool, not more than a hundred yards across, lay a mass of ragged bowlders piled together in inextricable confusion; beyond these a chasm with steam rising from it, whose bottom I could not see—a crack as though the ground had suddenly cooled and split apart. Across the entire surface of this little cliff-bound circular valley it was the same, as though here a tortured nature had undergone some terrible agony in the birth of this world.

The scene, which indeed had something infernal about it, would have been extraordinary enough by itself; but what made it even more so was the fact that several hundred girls were perched among these crags, sitting idle, or standing up and flapping their wings like giant birds, and more were momentarily swooping in from above. I had, for an instant, the feeling that I was Dante, surveying the lower regions, and that here was a host of angels from heaven invading them.

During the next hour fully a thousand girls arrived. There were perhaps fifteen hundred altogether, and only a few stragglers were hastily flying in when we decided to wait no longer.

Miela flew out around the little valley, calling them to come closer. They came flying toward us and crowded upon the nearer crags just beyond the pool, clutching the precipitous sides, and scrambling for a foothold wherever they could. A hundred or more found place on the ledge with us, or above or below it wherever a slight footing could be found on the wall of the cliff.

When they were all settled, and the scrambling and flapping of wings had ceased, Miela stood up and addressed them. A solemn, almost sinister hush lay over the valley, and her voice carried far. She spoke hardly above the ordinary tone, earnestly,

and occasionally with considerable emphasis, as though to drive home some important point.

For nearly half an hour she spoke without a break, then she called me to her side and put one of her wings caressingly about my shoulders. I did not know what she said, but a great wave of handclapping and flapping of wings answered her. She turned to me with glowing face.

"I have told them about your wonderful earth, and Tao's evil plans; and just now I said that you were my husband—and I, a wife, can still fly as well as they. That is a very wonderful thing, Alan. No woman ever, in this world, has been so blessed as I. They realize that—and they respect me and love you for it."

She did not wait for me to speak, but again addressed the assembled girls. When she paused a chorus of shouts answered her. Many of the girls in their enthusiasm lost their uncertain footholds and fluttered about, seeking others. For a moment there was confusion.

"I have told them briefly what we are to do," Miela explained. "First, to rid the Great City of Tao's men, sending them back to the Twilight Country; and do this in all our other cities where they are making trouble. Then, when our nation is free from this danger, we will plan how to deal with Tao direct, for he must not again go to your earth.

"And when all that is done I have said you will do your best to make our men believe as you do, so that never again will our women marry only to lose all that makes their virginity so glorious."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIRE PLANET.

I THINK I should explain now a little about the physical conformation of Mercury—the "lay of the land," so to speak—in order that the events I am about to describe may be more readily understood. It has already been made clear by Bob Trevor, I believe, that Mercury revolves on its axis only once during the time of its revolution around the sun. Thus,

just as a similar condition always makes our moon present very nearly the same face to us, so Mercury presents always the same portion of its surface to the sun.

It will be understood, therefore, that, theoretically, there must be on Mercury but one spot where the sun always is directly overhead. It could not be seen, however, owing to the dense clouds. This spot approximates the center of the region known as the Fire Country.

So far as I could learn, it was here that human life on the planet began. Certainly it was the first region where civilization reached any height. When Columbus was discovering America great cities flourished in the Fire Country—cities of untold wealth and beauty, now fallen into ruins like the great cities of our own Aztec and Inca civilizations.

The Fire Country was then like the equatorial regions of earth—a dense, tropic jungle, hotter than most temperatures we have to bear, but still, by reason of its thick enveloping atmosphere of clouds, capable of supporting life in comparative comfort. Its inhabitants were dark-skinned, but rather more like our Indians than Negroid races.

Then, several centuries ago—the exact time is uncertain, for no written records are kept on Mercury—came the Great Storms. Their cause was unknown—some widespread atmospheric disturbance. These storms temporarily parted the clouds in many places, allowing the direct rays of the sun to fall upon the planet's surface. The resulting temperature destroyed all life, withered all vegetation, with its scorching blast. The inhabitants of the Fire Country were killed by hundreds of thousands, their cities deserted, their land laid a desert waste.

These storms, which it appears began suddenly, have returned periodically ever since, making the region practically uninhabitable. Its surviving races, pushed outward toward the more temperate zone, were living, at this time I am describing, in a much lower state of civilization than the people of the Light Country—a civilization of comparative savagery. In the Light Country they were held as slaves.

This region—thus very aptly known as the Fire Country—embraces a circular area directly underneath the sun. So far as I could learn, it extended outward roughly to those points where—if it had been visible—the sun would have appeared some halfway between zenith and horizon.

Lying outside the circle, in a larger, concentric ring, is the zone known as the Light Country. Entirely free from the equatorial storms, no direct rays of sunlight have ever penetrated its protecting cloud blanket. Here exists the highest state of civilization on the planet.

Beyond the Light Country, in another concentric ring, lies the Twilight Country. It forms a belt about the planet, beginning roughly at those points at which the sun would appear only a short distance above the horizon, and extending back to where the sun would be below the horizon. In this region, as its name implies, there is never more than twilight. It is lightest at the borders of the Light Country, and fades into night at its other side.

Still farther, beyond the twilight zone, lies the region of perpetual night and cold—the Dark Country. This area embraces the rest of the planet, comprising something less than half of its entire surface. Here is eternal night—a night of Stygian darkness, unlighted even by the stars, since the same atmosphere makes them invisible.

The Dark Country, so far as it has been explored—which is very little—is a rocky waste and a sea of solid ice that never melts. Near the borders of the Twilight Country a few people like our Eskimos exist—savages with huge white faces, and great, staring eyes. There are a few fur-bearing animals and birds, but except for this fringe of life the Dark Country is thought to be uninhabited, its terrible cold making life in any form impossible.

So much, in general, for the main geographical features of Mercury. The Great City stands about halfway between the borders of the Fire Country and the edge of the twilight zone. This level marshland, the barren, metallic mountains, and a sort of semitropic jungle, partly inundated by water, comprise nearly all the area of the Light Country.

From the Great City, through the watery jungle, extends a system of little winding bayous—a perfect maze of them, with hundreds of intercommunicating branches—which it would be almost impossible to traverse without losing all sense of direction.

Beyond these bayous, into which their sluggish currents flow, lies the Narrow Sea. On its farther shore begins the Twilight Country, much of it a barren, semifrigid waste, with a little level, tillable land, vast rocky mountain ranges, and a few forests.

In spite of its inhospitable character the Twilight Country is fairly densely populated; and, I realized when I got into it, civilized life is exceedingly difficult to maintain there. I understood then why the Twilight People were so envious of land in the Light Country; and, in truth, I could not blame them for that, or for looking toward our earth with longing.

But just as the Light Country People had defended their borders with implacable determination, so was I determined that they should not invade my world, either. And I was ready to stake my life and even the lives of those I loved here on Mercury in the attempt to prevent them.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGHT AT THE BAYOU.

MIELA proceeded to explain our plan in détail to these fifteen hundred enthusiastic allies. It was my idea to build several platforms similar to this one on which Mercer and I had been carried up here into the mountains, only somewhat larger. We then proposed to seize these emissaries of Tao—there were not more than eight or ten of them altogether in the Great City—capturing them at night, without alarm, if possible, and transporting them summarily into the Twilight Country. My theory was that if they were to disappear thus mysteriously the people of the Great City would have no particular cause to make trouble afterward, and we hoped that the affair would soon be forgotten.

Mielia thought it practical for us to carry them in this way across the Narrow Sea.

The Lone City, from which Tao was operating, was located near the edge of the sea, and if we gave them food they would be enabled to reach it in safety in a day or two. The girls agreed enthusiastically with this plan, and we selected a number to carry it out.

Meanwhile we planned also to organize a system of aerial patrols, and detailed some two hundred of the girls, who in varying shifts were to fly back and forth along the borders of the sea over its Light Country shore, to make sure that Tao did not attempt to make a crossing by water.

"Can't they fly over as well as we can?" Mercer objected. "Their women fly, too, don't they?"

The women of the Twilight Country did fly, but for two reasons we did not fear an attack from them in the air. First, Miela doubted that the women would concern themselves in the affair; they were stupid and apathetic—fit only for child-bearing. The men might, of course, force them to the attempt, but even in that event, Miela explained, it would result in little; for generations of comparative inactivity and the colder climate had made them inclined to stoutness. Their wing muscles were weak and flabby, and with their greater weight of body they flew very badly.

"Suppose Tao should come over?" I suggested to Miela. "I don't believe he will—but if he should, how could we stop him?"

"By water he would come," she answered. "In boats—small they are, I think, those he has. We could not stop him, for the light-ray he would bring. But our women, flying over the ocean, would see him coming, and tell our king. More we could not do now."

"You mean this patrol would give the government the warning it won't obtain for itself? There would be war then? The people would arm to resist invasion?"

Miela smiled sadly.

"There would be war, Alan. But our government—our people—do not look for it. They are like the peeta bird, that hides its head under its wing when it is threatened."

The time of sleep was now nearly over, and we thought it best that the girls should fly back at once, so that their arrival at the city would cause as little comment as possible.

Mercer and I seated ourselves on the platform as before; the twenty girls grasped its handles, raising it until they were all upon their feet; then, at a signal, we left the ground. The trip back seemed shorter than coming up. The girls all left the valley together, flying up helter-skelter, and circling about us as we flew steadily onward.

Near the Great City the girls spread out, so as to approach it from different directions and thus attract less attention, although the time of sleep was not yet over and we knew that few would be stirring about the city.

When we reached home we greeted Lua, and dismissed the girls, arranging that they were to come back again that evening—fifty of them this time—to carry the larger platform we were to build. We then had breakfast, and after telling Lua the result of the meeting—at which she was greatly pleased—we went immediately to bed, for we were worn out.

It was about noon, I suppose, when we awoke. Mercer and I spent the afternoon building the platform on which to carry Tao's men—a framework with fifty handles instead of twenty. Miela and Anina disappeared for the whole afternoon. I did not know what they were doing at the time; later I found out Anina was devoting it to learning English.

During the evening meal we planned it all. Tao's men were living in a house near the edge of the city—the house Tao had occupied before he was banished to the Twilight Country. It had no other occupants at this time.

We had learned where they kept their boats in one of the bayous near by, and in it we intended to take them to the sea, where we would meet the girls, who would then fly with them to the Twilight Country. But we could not figure out how to capture them without alarming the city. We were sure they were unarmed; they had been carefully searched by the author-

ties when they entered the country. But they were ten to our two.

Mercer voiced the problem most emphatically.

"Ten men in a house," he declared. "Maybe we can catch them all asleep. But even if they are, how are we going to get them out? There'd be a row, and we don't want any noise. Besides, there's always this confounded daylight here. If we tied them up somebody might see us when we got outside. How do we get them out of that house without any rumpus, and down to that boat? That's what I don't see."

"I—do—that," said Anina suddenly.

She had spoken in English, and we looked at her in amazement. She lisped the words in her soft, sweet voice, haltingly, like a little child. Then she turned to Miela and poured out a torrent of her native language. Mercer stared at her in undisguised admiration.

As Miela explained it, Anina proposed that she go into Tao's house alone, and decoy his men down to the boat where we could capture them.

"But how will she get them there?" I exclaimed. "What will she tell them?"

"She says she can make them think she is one of those few of our women who sympathize with their cause," Miela explained. "And she will say that the earth-man who escaped from them she has seen lurking about their boat; perhaps he plans to steal it. She will go there with them, and they can recapture him."

"They might not all go," said Mercer. "We want to get them all."

"It is Anina's thought that they will all go, for they fear this earth-man much—and all would go to make sure of him."

I could not feel it was right for us to let Anina do so daring a thing, and Mercer agreed with me heartily. But Anina insisted, with a fire in her eyes and flushed cheeks that contrasted strangely with her usually gentle demeanor.

In the end Mercer and I gave in, for we could think of no better plan, and Miela was confident Anina would not be harmed.

It was about what would correspond with ten o'clock in the evening on earth when

the girls began to arrive. We waited until all fifty of them had come in. Miela named a place on the shore of the sea known to them all. They were to take the platform—starting in about two hours, when the city would be quiet—and there they would wait for us to join them in the boat.

We four started out together, but soon Anina left us to make her way to Tao's house alone. Mercer, Miela and I then hurried as fast as we could through the city down to the marshlands, and to the secluded spot on the bayou's bank where the boat was lying.

The bayou here was about a hundred feet wide, a winding, brackish stream, lined on both sides with trees whose roots were in the water and whose branches at times nearly met overhead. Its banks were a tangled mass of tree roots, huge ferns, palmettos and some tall upstanding kind of water grass. Half submerged logs jutted out into the sluggish current, making it in places seem almost impassable.

A narrow metal boat—a very long and very narrow motor boat with a thatched shelter like a small cabin over part of its length—lay fastened to a tree near at hand. I noticed at once some mechanism over its stern.

We had come up quietly to make sure no one was about. Now we hid ourselves close to the boat and waited with apprehension in our hearts for the arrival of Anina with Tao's men.

Half an hour, perhaps, went by. The silence in this secluded spot hung heavy about us. A fish broke the glassy surface of the water; a lizard scurried along the ground; a bird flitted past. Then, setting our hearts pounding, came the soft snapping of underbrush that we knew was the cautious tread of some one approaching. I was half reclining under a fallen tree, with a clump of palmettos about me. I parted their fronds carefully before my face. A few yards away a man was standing motionless, staring past me and apparently listening intently.

He moved forward after a moment. I feared he was coming almost upon us, but he turned aside, bending low down as he

crept slowly forward. Sounds in the underbrush reached me now from other directions, and I knew that the men had spread apart and were stalking the boat, expecting Mercer to be in or near it.

Had they all come down here? I wondered. And where was Anina? I looked down at Miela warningly as I felt her move slightly.

"We'll wait till they're all near the boat," I whispered to Mercer.

I saw Anina a moment later soaring over the bayou just above the treetops. I sighed with relief, for it was a signal to us that everything was all right. We continued to wait until the men had all come into view. They went at the boat with a sudden rush. Several of them climbed into it, with shouts to the others.

With a significant glance to Mercer I leaped suddenly to my feet. I was perhaps twenty feet from the boat, and the space between us was fairly clear. A single bound landed me beside it, almost among four of the men who were standing there in a group. Before they had time to face me I was upon them.

I scattered them like nine-pins, and two of them went down under my blows. The other two flung themselves upon me. I stumbled over some inequality of the ground, and we all three fell prone. This was the first time I had come actually to hand grips with any of the Mercutians.

I felt now not only their lack of strength, but a curious frailness about their bodies—a seeming absence of solidity that their stocky appearance belied. These two men were like half-grown boys in my hands. I was back on my feet in a moment, leaving one of them lying motionless. The other rose to his knees, his face white with pain and terror.

I left him there and looked about me. Miela was fluttering around near by, as I had instructed her—just off the ground and with the whole scene under her eyes. It was she on whom I depended for warning should any of the quarry attempt to escape us.

At the edge of the water another man was lying, whom I assumed Mercer had felled. There was a great commotion from

the boat. I ran toward it. A man was standing beside it—an old man with snow-white hair. He stood still, seeming confused and in doubt what to do. As I neared him he turned clumsily to avoid me. I passed him by and bounded over the boat's gunwale, landing in its bottom. The first thing I saw was Mercer struggling to his feet with four of the Mercutians hanging on him. One had a grip on his throat from behind; another clutched him about the knees.

The two others let go of him when they heard me land in the boat. One had evidently had enough, for he dived overboard. The other waited warily for my onslaught. As I got within reach I hit at his face, but my blow went wild. He hit me full in the chest, but it was the blow of a child.

At that instant I heard Mercer give a choking cry, and out of the corner of my eye saw him go down again. I could waste no more time upon this single antagonist. The man had his hands at my throat now. I seized him about the waist and carried him to the gunwale. He clung to me as a rat might cling to a terrier, but I shook him off and dumped him in the water.

I turned to Mercer just as he was struggling to his feet again, and in a moment more between us we had felled his two assailants. Mercer's face was very white, and I saw blood streaming from a wound on his head; but he grinned as he faced me.

"Have we—got 'em—all?" he gasped. He dashed the blood away from his eyes with the flat of his hand. "I fell—damn it—right at the start, and hit my head. Where are they all? Have we got 'em?"

Miela alighted in the boat beside us.

"Two are running," she said. "They are together. Hasten."

We jumped out of the boat. Miela flew up, and we followed her guidance through the dense woods. We could make much better speed, I knew, than the Mercutians. "We'll get them all, Ollie," I shouted at Mercer. "They're not far ahead. See up there—Miela's evidently over them now."

We came up to them after a few hundred yards. It was the old man, and one of those whom I had first encountered. They did not wait for us to attack them, but

stopped stock still, flinging their arms wide in token of surrender.

Miela came down among us, and we went back to where we had lain hidden in the palmettos. There we had left a number of short lengths of rope. While we were tying the arms of these two prisoners behind them and fettering their ankles so they could not run Anina joined us.

"Two—in water," she cried; and then added something to Miela.

"Two were in the water. Now they are in the woods, running. Anina will show you."

Miela stood guard in the boat over our first two prisoners, while Mercer and I rounded up the others. It was half an hour or more before we had them all trussed up, but none of the ten escaped. We were a long time reviving two of those we had injured, but finally we had them all lying or sitting in the boat.

Mercer's head had stopped bleeding. He washed it, and I found his injury no more than an ugly scalp wound.

"I fell and cut it on something," he explained lugubriously. "Couldn't see for the blood in my eyes. But we got 'em, didn't we?"

Under Miela's direction Mercer and I shoved the boat out into the stream. I need not go into details regarding the propelling mechanism of this craft. Miela explained it hastily to me as we got under way. It used a form of the light-ray from a sort of strange battery. The intense heat of the ray generated a great pressure of superheated steam in a thick metal cylinder underneath the keel.

This steam escaped through a nozzle under water at the stern of the boat, and its thrust against the water propelled the boat forward. The boat was constructed to draw very little water, and when going fast its bow planed upward until only the stern of the hull touched the surface. It was steered by a rudder not much different from some of those types we are familiar with on earth. When we got out into open water I found the boat was capable of great speed. This I attributed not so much to the efficacy of its propelling force as to the lightness of the boat itself. It was built of

some metal that I may perhaps compare with aluminium, only this was far stronger and lighter. The boat was, in fact, a mere shell, extraordinarily buoyant.

Miela sat in the stern, steering and operating the mechanism. I sat with her. Mercer was farther forward, beside Anina, talking to her earnestly. Our prisoners lay huddled in various attitudes—frightened, all of them, and obviously in no condition to give us further trouble. They were, I saw now, not ruffians by any means, but rather men of superior intelligence, selected by Tao evidently as those best fitted for spreading his propaganda among the people of the Great City.

We made slow progress down the bayou. Some of its turns were so sharp and so overhung with trees, and obstructed by fallen logs, we could hardly get through. During the latter part of the trip the bayou broadened rapidly, dividing into many channels like a delta.

We came out into the open sea finally—a broad, empty expanse, with a mirrorlike surface. The curvature of the planet was even more apparent now; it seemed almost as though the water should be sliding back downhill over the horizon.

We turned to the left as we came out of the delta, and for the first time Miela put the boat to the limit of its speed. The best comparison I can make, I think, to this rapid, noiseless, smooth progress, is that of sailing on an iceboat.

We sped along some five or ten miles, keeping close inland. I saw some of the small thatched shacks along here, though not many. For a while the shore remained that same palm-lined, half-inundated marshland. Then gradually it began to change, and we came upon a broad beach of white sand.

We landed here, and found the girls with the platform waiting for us. Miela took Anina and one or two of the older girls aside, and gave them last instructions.

"What do I do—just dump them on the other shore?" Mercer asked me.

"That's about it. I don't know the lay of the land over there. Anina does. You do what she tells you."

"You bet I will," he agreed enthusias-

tically. "Some kid—that little girl. We get along fine. She understands everything I say to her already. I'll have her talking English like a streak by the time you see her again."

We had removed the cords from our prisoners' ankles. I motioned them to get out of the boat. We crowded Tao's men on the platform. They were surprised, and some of them alarmed, when they saw how we proposed to transport them over the water. Miela silenced their protests, and soon we had them all seated on the platform, with Mercer at the rear end facing them.

The fifty girls grasped the platform handles. Another moment and they were in the air, with Mercer waving good-by to us vigorously.

Miela and I, left alone, watched them silently as they dwindled to a speck in the haze of the sky.

We were about to start back when we saw a girl coming toward us, flying low over the water. One of those we had directed to patrol the coast, Miela said when she came closer. She saw us, and came down on the beach.

The two girls spoke together hurriedly.

"Tao's men in the Water City have caused great disturbance, Alan," Miela said to me.

"Where's the Water City?"

"Near the Great City—across the marshlands. We must get back. And when Anina and our friend Ollie have returned we must go to the Water City. It is very bad there, she said."

Our trip back to the Great City was without unusual incident. We followed the main route at the best speed we could make.

"We shall tell our king, of course, about this disturbance," said Miela. "Perhaps he will think there is something he can do. But I fear greatly that unless he appeals directly to the people, and they are with him—"

"He's an old man," I said, "and all his councilors are old. They're not fit to rule at such a time as this. Suppose he were to die—what would happen? Who would be king then?"

"A little prince there is—a mere child.

And there is our queen—a younger woman, only married to our king these few years. His first queen died."

I questioned Miela concerning her government. It was, I soon learned, an autocracy in theory. But of later years the king's advanced age, and his equally old councilors whom he refused to change, had resulted in a vacillating policy of administration, which now, I could see plainly, left the government little or no real power.

Only by constantly pandering to the wishes of the people could the king hold his throne. The supreme command was held by the king and his aged councilors. At stated intervals the more prominent men of each city met and enacted laws. The cities were each ruled by a governor in similar fashion, paying tribute to the central government somewhat after our old feudal system; but for practical purposes they acted as separate nations. They were united merely by the bonds of their common need of defense against the Twilight People, and of intermarriage, which was frequent, since the virgins, flying about, often found mates in cities other than their own.

There were courts in each city, not much more than rude tribunals, and jails in which the offenders were held. The police I have already mentioned. They, like the king's guards, were inclined in an emergency to do, not so much what they were ordered, as what they thought the people wished.

It was all very extraordinary, but like many another makeshift government it served, after a fashion.

Hiding the boat in another bayou, we took our way home on foot. That is to say, I ran, and Miela followed me, alternately flying and walking. We made our best speed this way, and very soon were back at home in the Great City.

We crossed the garden and entered the front door, expecting to find Lua in the living room, but she was not there. The house was quiet.

"She would wait up, she told me," Miela said, and, raising her voice, called her mother's name.

There was no answer, although now I remember I thought I heard a footfall upstairs.

We went up to Lua's room hurriedly. It was empty, and our loud cries of anxiety throughout the house evoked no response. We entered our own bedroom, and before I could make a move to defend myself I was seized tightly by both elbows from behind.

At the same instant an arm hooked around my neck under my chin and jerked my head backward, and another pair of arms clutched me around the knees. I struggled vainly to free myself, shouting to Miela to run.

But there were too many holding me. A moment more and my arms were tied behind me and a rope was about my legs. I was pushed into a chair, and as I sat down I saw Miela standing quietly near by, with two Mercutians holding her by the arms and shoulders.

The man who had pushed me to the seat bent down and struck me across the cheek with the flat of his hand. His grinning, malevolent face was only a few inches from mine. I saw that it was Baar!

CHAPTER XVIII.

REVOLUTION.

THREE seemed to be five of our captors, all of them as evil-looking men as I think I have ever seen. They rummaged about the room, evidently in search for weapons they thought I might have secreted. Then they ordered me to stand up, and without more ado led Miela and me from the house.

This was once when I was glad of the interminable daylight. I hoped we might find some early risers about the streets, for I thought certainly the time of sleep must now be nearly over. But no one was in sight as we left the garden. We turned the first corner and headed toward the base of the mountain.

"To Baar's house they are taking us, I think. It is on the marshland below." Miela spoke without fear of our captors understanding the English words. We took advantage of this until after a moment we were roughly ordered to be quiet.

Lua, we thought, must have been taken

away before we arrived; we would find her at Baar's house when we arrived there. We had come down to the level marshlands now, the outskirts of the city, and were passing along a path between occasional shacks. Before us, standing alone in a rice paddy, I saw a larger, more pretentious house—a wooden structure on stilts, with a thatched roof, which Miela said was where Baar lived.

We went in single file up its board incline, and entered a squalid room with matting on the floor, a rude charcoal brazier at one side, and the remains of a previous meal lying on a table.

Two women were in the room as we entered. I took these to be Baar's wife and a servant. Two naked little children lay on the floor, one of them crying lustily.

Baar glanced around as he came in, and with what I took to be an oath ordered the children removed from the room. The slave woman—I could see she was a slave by the band upon her arm—picked them up. Evidently she did not move fast enough to suit Baar's temper, for as she straightened up the man cuffed her upon the head. She stumbled to one side against Baar's wife, who was standing there, and the other woman, with a sharp imprecation, struck her full in the breast.

Neither of them saw the look she gave as she shuffled away, carrying the infants; but I did. It was a look of the most intense hatred, born and nourished, I realized, by long ill-treatment.

Miela and I were now bound securely hand and foot, and Miela's wings were lashed to her body. Thus rendered entirely helpless, we were laid together in a corner.

From the talk that followed Miela gathered that Baar and his men were expecting the arrival of others. He roughly ordered his wife—a woman of the Twilight Country, obviously—to clear away the remains of their last meal and bring other food. She obeyed submissively.

This, the first of the Twilight Country People I had seen, was a thick-set woman of perhaps thirty-five, although she might have been older, for her black hair, which fell in an unkempt mass to her waist, was be-

ginning to gray. She wore a single garment, a pair of silken trousers, drab with dirt. Her clipped wings were covered in the usual way.

I could see now why Miela had said these Twilight women could not fly, for this woman's torso was fat and flabby. Her skin was curiously pale—a dead, unpleasant white. Her face was broad, heavy and unintelligent. Her eyes were large and protruded slightly.

Baar and his men ate breakfast, paying no further attention to Miela and me. Suddenly Miela spoke in a frightened whisper. "They are going now in a moment to the castle. The king they will kill!"

It was evidently a widespread plot we now overheard. Baar's followers had for some time been talking quietly with the lower classes, and, finding they could count on their support, planned now to murder the king. Then with the queen and the little prince held as hostages, they expected that the men of science, threatened also with a revolt of the peons, would release the light-ray.

The light-ray once in his control, Baar could make himself king. It seemed an absurd hope, but such was the plan they were now discussing. And what was far worse, I could see no way by which I could prevent the attempt.

"They are going to the castle—now—to murder the king?" I whispered, incredulous.

"Yes," Miela answered. "So they plan. Now—in a moment—before the time of sleep is over."

"Isn't he guarded? Can they get in the castle without arousing others?"

"There are the guards—a few. But Baar has promised them great wealth, and they will stand aside and let him pass. So it is arranged."

The arrival of several other men interrupted our whispered conversation. Baar, his meal over, consulted with them hurriedly. He then instructed his wife to watch us, and after a moment they all left the house.

The woman, who was now the only occupant of the room with us, shuffled about, clearing away the meal. I tried desper-

ately to work my hands loose; I even tried with my teeth to gnaw Miela's bonds, but without success. Every moment counted, if we were to do anything to save the king. I wondered again where Lua was—perhaps in another part of the house here, bound as we were.

"Miela," I whispered, "ask for food. Tell her we have had nothing for many hours. Perhaps she will loosen our bonds a little to let us eat. We may be able to do something then."

The woman answered Miela's pleading by setting us up side by side, with our backs against the wall. She placed food before us, and then, with a knife, cut the cords that bound our arms.

My heart leaped exultantly; but, instead of leaving us and going on with her work, she sat down just out of reach, holding the knife in her hand and watching us narrowly.

"We must eat, Miela," I said, using as casual a tone as I could and pointing to the food smilingly. "Eat, and pretend not to notice her. Perhaps I can get to my feet."

We ate the food she had given us. I tensed the muscles of my legs, and believed that, bound as I was, I might be able to leap forward and reach the woman. It was almost hopeless to attempt it, for I realized she would meet my body with the dagger point.

We were still eating, and I was thinking over this plan, when the slave woman appeared silently in a doorway across the room, behind the woman who faced us. Something in her attitude made me look away again casually and go on with my eating.

Miela had evidently not noticed her. A moment later she hurled herself upon Baar's wife from behind. At the same instant I threw myself forward, falling prone, but within reach of the seated woman. I gripped her with my hands, fumbling to catch her wrists, but before I could succeed she toppled forward and fell partly over me.

I heard Miela give a cry of fright. I struggled free and raised myself up to a

half-sitting position. Baar's wife lay beside me dead, with the slave woman's knife buried to the hilt in her back.

Reaching over, I took the knife from the dead woman's fingers, and with it cut the cords that bound my ankles. I sprang to my feet. The slave had retreated and stood shrinking against the side of the room, terrified at what she had done. I paid no more attention to her for the moment, but hastened to release Miela.

We searched the house hurriedly, calling to Lua; but she did not answer, nor could we find her. When we returned the slave woman was still standing where we had left her, staring with horrified eyes at the body of her mistress.

"Tell her what she did was right," I said. "She may have saved the king. Tell her to go to your house and wait for us."

The woman nodded eagerly when Miela told her what to do, and fell on her knees before us.

"She says she will serve us always. She has been very badly treated, Alan."

We sent the woman away, and with a last hasty glance around hurriedly left the house alone with its single dead occupant. A large wooden mortar and pestle, used for pounding rice, stood in the kitchen. I carried the pestle away with me; it was nearly five feet long and quite heavy—an excellent weapon.

We hastened up through the city—Miela half walking, half flying, and I carrying this bludgeon and running with twelve-foot strides. But it was now hardly more than three-quarters of an hour since we had passed this way before, and there were still few people about to see us. Baar and his men had started some twenty minutes before us, I figured, and we must reach the castle before them.

I made extraordinary progress over the level country. But I could not run uphill for long, and soon had to slow down to a walk. Miela kept closer to me now. We approached the castle grounds.

"Where will the guards be, Miela? We must avoid them if we can. They might try to stop us."

Miela did not know where they would be; but under the circumstances, as Baar

had told his men, she believed the guards would disappear from the vicinity. This conjecture proved to be correct. The guards, not wishing to be concerned in the affair at all, had simply disappeared. We saw nothing of Baar and his men on the way up the mountain, although I had hoped we might overtake them.

As we passed hurriedly through the palm gardens surrounding the castle I saw its huge front doors were closed.

"Miela, we can't get in that way. A side entrance—or some other way—"

"I know," she said. "There is a smaller door below, and others on the side."

We hastened on. Suddenly I gripped Miela by the arm.

"What's that—over there—see, beyond the grove?"

There seemed to be furtive figures lurking among the palms.

"Those cannot be Baar's men, Miela—there are too many. What can it—"

We had reached a little doorway under the front terrace. There was no time to investigate these advancing figures. Baar and his men might already be inside the castle.

I slid through the doorway, every muscle tense. Miela had brought the knife from Baar's shack, and with it clenched in her hand was close beside me. I wanted to make her stay outside, where she could fly away if danger threatened, but she pleaded to follow me, and I let her come. I needed her, since I had no idea of the interior arrangements of the building.

We passed along a dim hallway and up a narrow flight of stone steps. Not a sound came to us; the interior of the castle was silent as a tomb. At the top of the steps we came almost directly into the inner patio of the building. Across a bed of tall flowers, nodding gently in a little morning breeze that swept down from above, I saw the head and shoulders of a man standing in the center of the courtyard; the lower part of his body was hidden by the flowers. I tried to duck out of sight, but he had seen me.

He was not over forty feet away. I stepped back, believing I could reach him in a single leap; but Miela held me.

"Not you, Alan. He would cry out. The noise would bring others." She raised her knife, and her eyes blazed into mine. "Never have I thought to kill a human. But now I—a woman—must kill. Stand quiet, Alan."

She flew swiftly up and poised over the man. He had started toward us. Evidently he was, so far, as anxious for silence as we, for he made no sound. I saw now he was one of those who had come to Baar's shack. His naked shoulders, his thick neck, and bullet head were all that showed above the flower stems as he plowed his way through them directly toward me; but the hand he swung aloft to aid his progress held a knife.

He glanced up at Miela, poised in the air above him, and saw the weapon in her hand. At this new enemy he stopped, confused.

Miela swooped down at him, and he struck at her with his knife; but she avoided it with an incredibly swift turn, and a second later had passed him and was crossing the courtyard.

Round and round she flew, her great wings flapping audibly, a giant bird circling its prey. The man turned continually to face her. Several times she swooped toward him, and as swiftly avoided his blow. From every side she threatened. The man stood now bewildered, striking wild in a frenzy, as one strikes at a darting wasp. At last, with an agonized cry, he turned and ran. Instantly she dropped upon him; there was a flash of her white arm; the man's body crumpled and lay still among the flowers.

Miela was back beside me. Her breast was heaving; her eyes were full of tears; she trembled.

"A terrible thing, Alan, my husband, for a woman to do; but it had to be."

I pressed her hand with silent understanding.

"Come, Alan," she said. "They will have heard his cry. The others—we must meet them, too."

"We must get to the king. I—"

A vibrant scream rang out from the silence of the house—a man's voice, shrill with agony—then suddenly stilled.

"Good God, Miela! The king—where is he? Take me there."

She pulled me back through the doorway. A man scurried past. I leaped at him and struck him a glancing blow with the heavy wooden pestle. He stumbled to his knees. Without thought of giving quarter, I hit him again before he could rise. He sank back, senseless or dead.

Miela was ahead of me, and I ran after her along a hallway. The sound of scurrying footsteps sounded from overhead; a woman screamed.

A broad, curving stairway fronted us. I passed Miela halfway up, and, reaching the top, ran full into another man who darted from a doorway close by. The impact of my heavier body flung him backward to the floor. I leaped over him with a shout of warning to Miela, and ran on into the room.

A man was standing stock still in its center. It was Baar. He flung his knife at me as I appeared, but it went wild. Two other men were coming toward me from opposite sides of the room. I swung the bludgeon about me viciously, keeping them away. Suddenly Baar shouted a command, and before I could reach any one of them they had scurried away like rats.

A low bed with a huge canopy of silk stood against the wall. A woman knelt on the floor beside it, and against her knees huddled a little half-grown boy.

I heard Miela's voice shouting in her own language. The sound of men running came from below. Then Miela's half-hysterical laughter, and then the words:

"They are running away, Alan—all of them. I have been calling you to bring me the light-ray. And they are running away."

I turned to the bed, pushing its curtains aside, and then hurriedly closing them again with a shudder.

Miela was beside me.

"The king is dead, Miela. No—you must not look."

Her eyes widened; her hand went to her breast.

"There is one who needs you." I pointed to the woman on the floor

She was staring at us, unseeing, one arm

flung about the child protectingly, holding him partially under one of her long, sleek red wings. The fingers of her other hand clutched convulsively at the bed coverings; she was moaning softly with a grief and terror all the more intense because it was restrained.

"There is one who needs you, Miela," I repeated. "Comfort her—for we have come too late."

The castle now was in thorough confusion. Several waiting maids rushed into the room, stared at their mistress and the little prince, and, seeing what had happened, stood silently wringing their hands in fright, or fled aimlessly through the halls. One of the king's councilors had come in, stopping, bewildered, at the scene that met him.

"Tell him what has occurred, Miela," I said.

There came now faintly to my ears from outside the castle sounds of a gathering crowd—murmurs and vague muffled shouts. The cries grew louder. A rain of missiles struck the castle; a stone came through a near-by window, falling almost at my feet. All at once I remembered the lurking figures we had seen among the palms in the garden.

"Miela!" I cried. "Hear that, outside! A crowd is gathering. The men we saw—out there! People whom Baar has—Miela, ask him, for God's sake, to tell us how we can get weapons. Where are the other councilors? Send for them. We must do something—now, at once. This is revolution, Miela—don't you understand? Revolution!"

I felt so impotent. Here in this crisis I could talk to no one but Miela—could issue no direct commands—could understand the words of no one but her.

Suddenly, from over our heads, a great, solemn deep-throated bell began tolling.

"What is that? What does that mean?" A girl rushed into the room.

"It is the bell of danger," said Miela quickly. "The girls are ringing it to arouse the city. Up here then will the people hurry to find out what it is that threatens."

"They're outside now," I retorted. "Order all the king's councilors here at once. Find out if any guards are about the place. Send them here. Where is the head of the city's police? Send him here to me! Tell him to call out all his men."

What was I saying? I had forgotten the one vital thing!

"Miela! The light-ray! These men of science who guard it, where are they? Send for their leader. Get him here to me at once—we must have the ray!"

Miela stood very quietly beside me. Her face was white; her eyes blazed, but she seemed calm and unfrightened.

"He will come," she said, "and armed with the ray. The bell will bring him. Your other commands I will see are obeyed."

The old councilor, who had been standing by, dazed, came slowly forward at Miela's call. The king's councilor! And all the others were like him. The king was dead, and here was the little prince huddled in his mother's arm! Realization had been slow in coming, but now it broke upon me like a great light.

I flung the bludgeon away from me, and stood erect.

"Miela," I cried, "tell him—tell them all—their king is dead. It is I who command now. There is no one else—and I have the power. Tell them that. It is I, the man from earth, who commands!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Don't fail to read the absorbing Novelette in next week's issue

HER FATHER'S CONSENT

By GEORGE BRONSON-HOWARD

It will grip you from the very outset.



Anonymous

By STUART RIVERS

SAM HILTON looked reproachfully over the edge of the covers at his alarm clock dancing and howling in a fit of rage. With an air of patient suffering he reached out, shut it off and dropped wearily back on the pillow. All at once he became charged with sudden life, and kicking the covers over the foot of the bed, leaped out on the rug. He had just remembered that it had been almost seven hours since he had last gazed upon Constance Gunning's picture.

Yawning and rubbing his fingers through his rumpled hair, he stood before the dresser gazing sleepily into the eyes of a girl's photograph that smiled back at him from a silver frame. Her hair was evidently light and she wore it quite low on her forehead and piled up at the back, only one couldn't be sure of this because the shadows of the background interfered. Her eyes were also in shadow, but this only made one wish

to see more of them, for they looked like the sort of eyes that could hold all manner of fun and laughter. Altogether she was very pretty. Sam reached this same conclusion just in time to insult her by yawning in her face and stretching his arms over his head as he shivered in the chill morning wind.

"I wonder," he mused aloud as he shoved his arms into the sleeves of his dressing gown, "if I shall see her to-day?"

This prospect was so enticing that he hurried into the other room and set the coffee pot on the electric stove, then he disappeared into the bathroom, from which, in a moment, some excited remarks testified that Sam was coming to life under the effects of a cold shower.

After gaining certain distinction from the fact that he had led the Yale football team to the championship, Sam had entered the intricate world of Wall Street in the ca-

pacity of bond salesman for Gunning & Co. There he discovered that his physical condition counted for much, and the same ability that had served him so well in college counted for more, and he forged ahead so rapidly that Mr. Gunning called him into his private office and complimented him.

This meant a great deal. Mr. Gunning was *not* among the lesser powers in the Street. Indeed, men said the market ate out of Mr. Gunning's hand, and when things slid out from under and the lambs were caught by their pretty pink toes, it was whispered around that old man Gunning had raked in a couple of country estates, a few private yachts and a fleet or so of motor cars.

•

That day Sam had walked from the office touching the floor only about once in every three strides, and then he fell into real happiness and real trouble all at the same instant. Coming toward him was the most radiant creature in the world. She was talking and laughing with dried-up old Peters, the head bookkeeper. Sam had instantly loathed Peters and then loved him, because the next moment he was being introduced to Constance Gunning. Sam held her hand for a long time and remembered all the lonesome years of his life and marveled greatly that he had been able to live through them.

Apparently Constance's thoughts were in perfect unison with his, for she never did reach her father's office. Instead she went down to the street with Sam, where she let him buy her a soda and told him that she liked men with gray eyes.

Their friendship was as swift as a ten-inch shell—and as deadly. Two days later Sam explained to Constance that he loved her as no other girl had ever been loved. Constance said that she had known it all the time and kissed him and let him slip a ring, with a very small diamond, on her finger—and then the trouble began to make itself apparent.

Mr. Gunning had laid careful plans regarding his daughter's future, but the possibility of her becoming the wife of one of his own bond salesmen figured in none of them. Sam was called into the private office for his second interview, and Mr. Gun-

ning pointed these things out to him. The interview ended by Mr. Gunning requesting Sam never to show his face inside the Fifth Avenue house again, denied him the use of the telephone and the United States mail, and fired him, telling him to "get to hell out and stay out!"

Sam had gone directly to a telephone, and a half hour later he and Constance were having tea in a little tea shop on Fortieth Street. She had tried to induce him to go with her to the City Hall so they could get a marriage license without further delay.

With the picture of Mr. Gunning still vivid in his mind, Sam had demurred, and raised so many objections that Constance had accused him of not loving her.

"I do love you," Sam had answered gloomily. "But the trouble is that your father doesn't love me!"

"That's perfectly stupid!" Constance had exclaimed. "Because you are not marrying my father; you are marrying me—at least, you said you wanted to marry me—maybe—"

"If you look like that again," Sam had interrupted, "I'm going to kiss you and horrify the waitress!"

So they didn't reach any decision, but went to a movie instead and sat in the gallery because the seats were cheaper than in the orchestra. The picture was a "society drama," in which the thirty-five-year-old heroine with curls to her waist, refused to sell herself for gold, but married her father's chauffeur instead. Constance felt very much cheered up and held Sam's hand when the lights went out for the next picture.

"You see," she had whispered. "That's the way it's going to be with us! We're going to live happily ever afterward!"

"It listens well," Sam had muttered, unconvinced. "Only that chap turned out to be a prince in disguise, and if I'm a prince, my retainers and subjects have forgotten to mention the fact."

Then Constance had made herself quite clear by saying that if Sam didn't get up enough nerve to marry her, she would marry some one else out of spite. Sam had pleaded for a month in which to make a fortune so he could give her something near to what

she had been accustomed, and Constance had reluctantly consented.

Now, as he stood looking sourly at the coffee pot and waiting for it to boil over, he remembered only too well that his time of probation was up by something like sixteen hours. It was up to him, and up to him darn soon or she would carry out her threat.

His rooms were in a remodeled building on Twelfth Street, and after breakfasting with the photograph propped up against the sugar bowl, he walked down the stairs to find the postman sticking some letters into the little brass boxes at the left of the door. The United States mail service was being maintained for the express purpose of carrying letters from Constance to himself, so he ran down the last few steps and peered into his box as the postman went out of the door.

Ah! As expected! He could see the letter through the little glass door. He fumbled with a key, reached inside and, to his dismay, drew out a somewhat rumpled postal card addressed to him in lead pencil. Turning it over and moving to the light, he made out the following inscription:

Buy M. Q. Oil. Sell at twenty-four.

"Huh!" Sam muttered. "Why M. Q. Oil?"

He turned the postal over and once more inspected the address. There was no clew to the sender, but he decided that a woman had written it, and probably an old woman, because the writing was more or less irregular and cramped.

"Now who the deuce—" he began, and again dropped his perplexed gaze to the card. It had been posted down town, for it bore the imprint of the Hudson Terminal Station, but that was a large order and it told him nothing.

"Now who the deuce—" he repeated, and got no further.

Somehow, though he could not tell why, he vaguely associated the card with a woman he had bumped into the day before. He had been crossing Church Street under the Sixth Avenue Elevated tracks and had attempted to get out of an old lady's way as she scampered across the street. In that

instant a truck had appeared out of nowhere. Sam lifted his hat of danger and when he got her to the sidewalk she had expressed her gratitude in disconnected gasps.

"Oh, that's all right," he had laughed. "Glad I could help."

Now, as he stood in the hall, looking through the little panes of glass beside the door, he tried to recall her more clearly. He distinctly remembered that she had worn a bonnet, tied under her chin with black ribbons, and her eyes, he decided, were sort of "soulful-looking eyes."

"That's ridiculous!" he exclaimed aloud, shoving the card into his coat pocket and opening the door. "Perfectly absurd! She doesn't know me from—didn't even ask my name! Besides, what in the world would that old lady know about M. Q. Oil? Foolishness—forget it!"

But he didn't forget it. He reached the corner of Sixth Avenue, bought a paper and the first thing he looked for was the stock quotations. M. Q. Oil, the night before, had closed at twelve and an eighth. Probably it hadn't moved far away from the figure for the past six months. Sam laughed scornfully and tore the postal into little pieces as he walked down to the station at Eighth Street.

There were two or three places Sam had made up his mind to get in if he could, and one of them was Borden & Borden, brokers. Joe Borden, the son, had roomed across the hall at New Haven.

Sam turned out of Broad Street into a building, and an elevator whisked him up to an office where a lot of men were sitting in armchairs before a big blackboard on which a boy was changing little cards that he took from a belt around his waist.

Sam didn't see Joe at first, so he found a seat at the back of the room and fell to a study of the board. He knew it by heart already and was on familiar terms with most of the offerings. While he watched the boy advance Steel an eighth, and then a quarter, and then, walking to the other end of the board, he stuck a new card under M. Q. Oil. For those who had that particular stock for sale, the little numbers proclaimed that they could find buyers, and

those buyers were willing to pay fourteen dollars a share.

Sam blinked and drew himself to a straighter position in the chair.

"Two points," he muttered. "This morning! Now," he added excitedly, "what does that mean?"

He began wishing that he had been a little less hasty in destroying the postal. He was not sure if it had said twenty-two or twenty-six or twenty-four.

"It said twenty-four," he decided at last, and gave so much attention to the board that Joe Borden entered the customers' room, hung his hat and coat in a corner and went on into an inner office without Sam seeing him.

During the next half hour the rise in M. Q. was very slow, but it was as steady as an eight-day clock. An eighth, a quarter, another eighth, another quarter. Sam wet his lips and began to figure on how much money, in a pinch, he could raise. His bank book showed something less than five hundred dollars. He had a very nice set of pearl cuff links and the electric stove, not to mention the silver frame around Constance's picture, but aside from these very few things, his possessions were unpawnable.

At the same time five hundred dollars, or even four hundred dollars, would buy a certain number of shares, on a margin of course, and with a ten point rise. At this point Sam started out of his chair, only to sink back with a look of determination crossing his features.

Ever since the day he first entered Wall Street he had taken a solemn vow never to play the market. He had bought some few shares outright and held them for a profit, but never, never on a margin. This—well, this was a totally different matter. How in the face of the good Sam Hill did the person who wrote that card know that M. Q. Oil was going up? And if he had known, why had he told him?

He felt in his pocket for his check book and—shook his head.

"It's only a little flurry!" he reasoned to himself. "A twelve-point rise! No, not with me! I'm going somewhere and get some lunch and by the time I come back she'll be down to rock bottom again."

Sam reached the street and headed for the buffet lunch. At that moment he heard an excited voice calling his name, and wheeling, he found himself facing Constance, who was waving to him from her father's limousine.

"Come on, get in!" she exclaimed when he approached. Her eyes were sparkling with all the fun the photograph had promised. "Father's just gone up to the office, so he won't want the car all day. We can drive out into Westchester and pick flowers. Hurry! He may look out of the window."

Sam glanced apprehensively at the building which sheltered Mr. Gunning, and brought his eyes back to the grinning face of the chauffeur.

"You don't care how I die, do you?" he asked, turning to the girl. "Don't you like me any more?"

"Don't be silly!" she scolded. "Hurry! Isn't this luck? I came down because I had a hunch that I'd see you. Get in! Do hurry!"

He hastened to obey, and she turned to him with a frown as he settled himself on the cushion. "I suppose," she observed icily, "that you know your month is up? What are you going to do about it?"

Instead of answering he took her hand, and the chauffeur turned around in time to catch them.

"Oh, drive anywhere," Constance exclaimed. "Out in the country. Quite far out."

They came back to town very late in the afternoon, and the chauffeur, on his way down to pick up Mr. Gunning—who, very much disgusted, had gone home in the subway—dropped them at Vicars's, where they had tea with some friends, so it was still later when Sam took Constance home in a taxi and helped her out in front of the Fifth Avenue house. He was careful to hop back into the cab again with the least possible delay.

"You will do something to-morrow, won't you?" she pleaded, pausing on the sidewalk and looking back at him. "Please!"

When Constance said "please" in that tone of voice and gazed at Sam through half-closed eyes, he always felt a mad desire to shout aloud. He remembered, in

time, that he was in front of Mr. Gunning's residence, and restrained the impulse, contenting himself with leaning toward her through the cab door.

"Don't you ever dare do that again!" he threatened. "Because I refuse to be responsible for my actions!"

She pouted, and if anything, Constance's pout was more charming than her "please."

"Take me away, driver!" Sam gasped in sudden panic. "Go! Beat it!"

After taking most of Sam's money, the driver, when he reached Forty-Second Street, dismissed his passenger and Sam wandered over to Broadway and entered the back room of a place where they once sold very famous beer.

He ate in abstracted attention, his mind still filled with Constance's pout, until a newsboy came in with a sporting extra. Mechanically he dropped three cents into the boy's hand and opened the paper at the financial page.

M. Q. Oil had closed at thirteen and a half, but—and Sam gulped as he read the figures—the highest point it had touched during the day was twenty-six.

Sam scowled darkly at the back of a man's head just in front of him, as though the stranger was responsible for that sudden flurry in oil. He was figuring how much he had not won, and it made his head ache, and he caught himself wishing there was a law against writing anonymous postal cards. But above these thoughts, as one ray of hope like a flash lamp in a cellar, he was utterly and entirely thankful that he had not told Constance about the postal.

"Yes," he nodded gravely. "She would have broken it off, and broken it off so sudden that I wouldn't ever have been able to catch my breath!"

The paper said that some one had been trading very heavily in M. Q. and went on to give a dozen rumors that had been current in financial circles for the activity in the stock.

In complete dejection he paid his check and by way of the Seventh Avenue surface car took himself back to his room. Before he went to bed he covered a dozen sheets of paper with figures. By his calculations he and Constance should have been on their

way to the Maine woods, where they would camp out for their honeymoon.

Dressing the following morning was a slower process than usual. He told Constance's picture all about the trouble, but she only smiled back at him with so much understanding that he felt better, put on his hat and went downstairs to find another postal in the brass mail box. Holding it between shaking fingers, he read:

Buy Southern Copper. Sell at seventy-five.

"My word!" he breathed, gazing in alarm at his reflections in the glass door. "I wonder if this thing is a sort of Black Hand affair! They'll come around and blackmail me for my profits, or blow me up!"

He remembered having seen Southern Copper quoted somewhere around fifty-five the day before, and if it went to seventy-five, and he had four hundred dollars' worth on a margin—he bolted from the house and almost ran to the corner, where he snatched up a paper to reassure himself that his memory was not at fault.

Southern Copper had been offered at fifty-five and an eighth and had found takers at fifty-five. Sam ducked into a drug store, and after finding Borden & Borden's number in the book, entered a telephone booth.

His scruples were still very lively. He didn't in the least want to buy Southern Copper on a margin, but there was Constance's ultimatum to be considered. "With a twenty-point rise and four hun—"

His musings were cut short, for a voice answered the call, and Sam wanted to know if Joe Borden had arrived at the office. Yes, Mr. Borden was there, and a moment later Sam's four hundred dollars belonged to some one else.

This made him feel very comfortable during the walk down to the Elevated until he suddenly remembered that the postal might be wrong and that instead of advancing twenty points, Southern Copper might drop off an equal amount. He would be swept as clean as a new broom could sweep him. There was nothing cheerful about this, so he was quite miserable during the ride down town.

When he at last reached the customers' room of Borden & Borden's office he was met, almost before he set foot inside the doorway, by Joe, who greeted him with a howl of delight.

"Where'd you pick up that tip?" he wanted to know. "And why didn't you tell me it was a sure thing?"

"Sure!" Sam faltered, looking wildly at the blackboard.

"Your stop order saved you!" Joe explained. "She touched seventy-six, went up like a rocket and dropped like a buckshot! If you get hold of anything else like that and you don't tell me—but why didn't you buy more?"

Sam walked heavily to a chair and sat down. "I will," he muttered, "next time."

He went down to the street again and, against orders, telephoned Constance.

"Well?" she asked, as she recognized his voice. "Your month—"

"I want to see you!" he exclaimed. "I want to—"

"Mother's coming!" she gasped excitedly. "Meet me to-morrow at Vicars's! I have to go to Aunt Martha's—"

A clap of thunder ended the sentence, and Sam knew that Constance had been interrupted. He hung the receiver back on the hook and left the booth, secretly consigning Aunt Martha to a life sentence in Siberia.

To-morrow—why to-morrow was twenty-four hours away. The world might come to an end before to-morrow, and besides, she hadn't said what time to-morrow. He started back into the telephone booth, but thought better of it, and issued out into Broad Street instead, where he stood on the pavement and gloomily watched the crowd until he turned at last toward the subway and made his way uptown to Vicars's.

He dined in solitary state and tried to imagine that Constance was sitting across the table from him. It was a dreary day, and before it was over he hated himself and the world and everything in it.

That night he lay awake for hours, speculating on the chances of finding another postal. He had gone over every possible solution of the mystery, only to confess that he was no nearer the answer. When he thought

of the cards he always thought of the old lady in the bonnet, but as this was totally out of all reason he forced it out of his mind and began all over at the beginning.

He beat the alarm clock by half an hour the following morning, and was downstairs fifteen minutes before the postman put in an appearance. Sam told himself that he was crazy to expect a card; a sane man would have breakfasted comfortably and comfortably started out to look for a job, and then the postman, who didn't know Sam from a black cat, stuck the card in the box, and Sam snatched it out again.

It told him, in the same scrawled penciled words, to buy Union Motors and to sell again after an eleven-point gain.

He telephoned the order from the drug store and went down town to Borden & Borden's office, where Joe buttonholed him and pumped him dry, which was easily done, because Sam truthfully said that he didn't know anything about it.

Joe was frankly skeptical about Union Motors. He said he didn't think Sam had a chance of making anything. This piece of news depressed Sam so much that he forgot to call Constance on the telephone until nearly two o'clock, when he found that she had left the house. Also he failed to locate her at Vicars's, so he went back to the customers' room and watched his stock creep slowly up the eleven-point gain which the postal had predicted, add a few points, apparently for luck, and begin to fall off as slowly as it had gained.

"You won yesterday, too, didn't you?" Joe asked curiously, as he met Sam walking toward the door after he had sold his holdings in Union Motors. "Who's putting you up to this? Come on, Sam, let me in on it."

"I told you I didn't know," Sam repeated.

It was not an answer to inspire credulity, and Joe snorted in utter disgust. "Hey!" he called over his shoulder. "Will you tell me if you get any more?"

"Yes," Sam nodded. "But I won't get any more."

He spent the evening trying to get in touch with Constance until the butler, finally out of patience, told Sam that Constance had gone away. "If hit'll do you hany

good, sir," he added with a touch of malice, "Hi don't think as she's comin' back hany more!" Whereupon he rang off, and Sam cursed him to the most remote generation that he could think of.

The following morning Sam received another postal, and while he read it, held the bit of pasteboard as though it were a live snake.

This was the message that he read:

Buy Consolidated Electric. It will go to twenty-six

"They don't care how fast I get rich," he murmured to himself. Placing the card tenderly in his pocket he took his way to the Elevated.

Upon reaching the broker's office he dragged his friend into a corner and whispered a few short words into his ear.

"Now," he finished. "Don't, for Heaven's sake, blame me if the confounded thing goes down!"

"Consolidated Electric!" Joe exclaimed in alarm. "You don't mean to tell me you are going to buy that? Not at this time!"

"If not sooner," Sam nodded. "Stick around and watch."

He had shaken off his fear of losing. Those postals were coming from some one, or something, with inside information of a kind not to be lightly disregarded. The writing was the same, still small and cramped, scrawled with the stub of a pencil. Sam didn't know why he felt that it was the stub of a pencil, but his mind was very clear on this point. And another thing he was sure of, the old lady with the bonnet was writing the cards.

Consolidated Electric increased Sam's fortune to such proportions that he was beginning not to care how much more he made. With what he already had he and Constance could laugh at Mr. Gunning, and do it to his face. But Constance was not to be found. When he called her house a disagreeable man's voice informed him that Miss Constance had gone away, and that he was under orders not to disclose her address.

Sam groaned in an agony of spirit and went to the theater where he sat all by himself in a stage box and stared morosely at

the curtains in the hope that he might catch sight of the girl he loved.

In a short week—the arrival of the postals had been as regular as the sun—he reached a point where it bored him to think of Borden & Borden. He felt that if he was called upon to look at another stock quotation he would buy out the stock market and dump it into the East River. And then the papers got hold of the thing.

A reporter cornered him in the customers' room and forced him to disclose the story of his life. While Sam wasn't looking a photographer snapped his picture.

"But how much have you made?" the reporter asked, not without a touch of envy.

"I don't know," Sam answered. "I haven't had time to count it up."

The reporter made a note of this, and signaling to the photographer, departed to do his worst with the power of the press.

This, when it was helped out by some genius of the copy desk, was quite sufficient, and Sam beheld the smudged picture of himself over the following caption:

Samuel Hilton, the boy financial king of Wall Street, who has won an enormous fortune during the past two weeks by his almost uncanny stock transactions.

Above the picture, and spread across three columns, big black type announced to Sam that he was fighting Wall Street to a standstill, and that he was too busy to count up his profits.

"That's nice, that is!" Sam exclaimed hotly. "Now, whoever it is that's sending me those cards will know all about it! I may as well expect to be bombed to-night."

He was about to throw away the paper when his eye fell on another headline, stuck inconspicuously down in one corner of the sheet. It read as follows:

CLAIRVOYANT ROUTS JUDGE

Woman Tells Judge Braud's Inside History

Sam had the paper again in his hands and was perusing a short account of "a woman, giving her name as Mrs. James Murry of East New York," who had set the court room in an uproar when she claimed to receive a message from her spirit guide who, so Mrs. Murry said, informed

her that Judge Braid had dined the evening before with a young lady who was not his wife. Then followed this report:

Mrs. Murry is an elderly lady, rather motherly-looking, and save for her somewhat soulful-looking eyes, is not the type of the usual clairvoyant. From under the brim of her old-fashioned bonnet, tied with ribbons under her chin, she gazed at the judge in all seriousness as she delivered her "message." Judge Braid sputtered in confusion, but whether her "information" was correct, he did not say.

It is alleged that Mrs. Murry has been practicing her trade of clairvoyant in the down town district, where she has been purporting to give information and "messages" pertaining to the movements of the stock market. She will be held for General Sessions, without bail.

"My word!" Sam grunted, and over the top of the paper he stared out of the window with startled eyes. "Purporting!" he broke out in derision. "I rather think she has been 'purporting'!"

He knew that it was up to him to do something; but what? Of course there was no shadow of proof that the old lady whom he had saved from the truck and Mrs. Murry were one and the same person, and this much he allowed quite cheerfully; but then he turned right around and decided that he had better get her a lawyer.

Sam told himself that he owed her this much, and that it was only decent that he should pay his debt. With this idea in mind he searched out Joe Borden and told him that he had immediate use for a lawyer. Whom could he recommend?

"John Woods," Joe returned without hesitation. "But he'll stick you an awful bill."

"That's the man," Sam answered. "Write his address on this card."

Sam reached the door, opened it, and stood face to face with Constance Gunning.

"Why—why!" he gasped. "Well—where have you been?"

"Father took me out to Aunt Martha's and made her promise to keep me there. I ran away and came back as soon as I could. And they told me I'd find you over here, and is it true?" She gasped for breath. "The money, I mean?"

"True!" he laughed. "But come on,

I'll tell you about it. We're going first to a jail, where I'm going to try to see a friend of mine, then we're going to a lawyer's, and after that we're going to buy a car and go to some State where they don't ask you to wait an unheard number of days—after you get a license—before you can get married."

"Is it as much as that?" she asked, as they reached the street.

"As what?"

"The money you've made?"

"It's more," he assured her. "It's not only enough for me to marry you, but it's enough to support you!"

A short time later, with a ten-dollar bill showing conspicuously between his fingers, Sam interviewed an official who was not at all in favor of Sam's plan. He caught sight of the money at this moment and led Sam through a series of halls and doors until he came to a cell in which a woman was sitting on a chair, apparently perfectly contented with her surroundings.

Mrs. Murry was large, tall, raw-boned, gawky, and awkward. In a daze Sam glanced about the cell and his eyes lit on a black bonnet, with brilliant red cherries fastened about the brim.

"Take me away," he breathed to the official. "I've seen enough. And all I've got to say is that I have a fine opinion of that newspaper man's imagination and his idea of an old-fashioned bonnet."

The official led the way back to where they had left Constance.

"We don't have to go to the lawyer's," Sam explained when they reached the street. "It was a mistake." He turned to the driver and gave the address of the building on Twelfth Street. "I'll pick up a bag," he said as the car rolled away. "Then we'll stop for your things, and after that we'll only hit the high spots till we get to a State that looks awfully good to you."

"But I want to know why we visited the jail?" Constance demanded.

"Ask me anything but that!" Sam groaned. "Because if I answered you it wouldn't be the truth, and if I told you the truth you wouldn't marry me."

"Sam!"

"I mean I'm only weak from the chin

up, he explained. "I haven't committed any crime. The fact of the matter is that I haven't enough sense to commit a crime."

Sam left her still pouting while he ducked into the house and produced a grip full of clothes. With these they started uptown and stopped in front of her home on Fifth Avenue.

Sam hopped out, helped Constance to the sidewalk, and was on the point of hopping back in again when his eye fell upon Mr. Gunning walking serenely down the steps.

A malicious grin was on the man's face, and Sam stood still in his tracks with his heart doing some queer things in his breast. Mr. Gunning advanced, held out his hand and—unless Sam had taken leave of his senses—smiled.

"That's great work you've been doing down town," he began. "Compliment you on it. Sorry you thought it necessary to leave our house. Hope to see you back again some day. I didn't know you were acquainted with my daughter. How is that, Constance?"

"You didn't know?" Sam repeated, finding a strange difficulty in breathing. "You didn't—"

"You didn't—" Constance began, staring in amazement. "You—"

"Coming in?" Mr. Gunning asked. Apparently he had overlooked Sam's grip.

"We were—" Sam gulped. "We were—"

"Going for a ride, Thomas?" Constance finished.

"Beautiful day," Mr. Gunning remarked. "Stop in on your way back and have dinner with us. I've got something I'd like to talk over with you."

"Thank—thank you!" Sam faltered, and he helped Constance back into the taxi.

"I guess this belongs to you," Mr. Gunning said. "It's a note some one left at the office."

Sam was unable to speak. He simply stared as Mr. Gunning turned back toward the steps.

When they were speeding through the park Sam turned to the girl and stared at her.

"I think I know," she said after a moment. "It was mother. I told her that I was going to run away with you, and I said that if I did I never expected to set foot in their house again. I was mighty serious. It scared them, don't you see, and father's relented, and probably he was able to fix it up with mother because you've made all this money. Just think, Sam, now I can have a wedding—what was the note?"

He raised the bit of paper and glanced at it, then choked back a cry of amazement. It was a post card, and in the same scrawled writing his mysterious friend had given him a parting message.

"'You are welcome,'" Constance read aloud. "What does he mean by that?"

"He!" Sam retorted. "It isn't a he, it's a she!"

"She—he—what do you mean?" Constance exclaimed.

"I mean a woman wrote this post card!"

She screamed in derision. "A woman! That writing! Why, I'd know it at the north pole!"

"You'd know it?" he breathed. "Then who's—then—"

"Why, it's father's!" she exclaimed. "Whose did you suppose it was?"

CUPID'S HELPER

MARY had a little bin
As empty as could be,
And fearing winter's icy blast
She wed a coal man—me!

James W. Campbell.



Castes

By W. A. FRASER

Author of "The Three Sapphires," "Thoroughbreds," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AFGHAN.

DEWAN SEWLAL had warned Hunsa and Sookdee against their natural proclivities for making a decoit while traveling to the Pindari camp, as the mission was more important than loot—an enterprise that might cause them to be killed or arrested. Indeed, the Gulab had made this a condition of her going with them. She was practically put in command. Both Nana Sahib and the Dewan were pleased over what they deemed her sensible acquiescence in the scheme. As has been said, the Dewan, recognizing the debased ferocity of Hunsa, had promised him the torture when he returned if Bootea had any cause of complaint.

The decoit, believing that Bootea was designed for Nana Sahib's harem, knew that as one favored in the prince's eyes, he would surely be put to death if he offended her.

So, traveling with the almost incessant swift progress which was an art with all decoits, in a few days they arrived at Rajgar, the town to which Amir Khan had shifted. He had taken possession of a palace belonging to the Rajput rajah as his headquarters, and his army of horsemen were encamped in tents on the vast, sandy plain that extended from both sides of the River Nahal. The local name of this river was "The Stream of Blood," so named because a fierce force of Arab mercenaries in the employ of Sindhia, many years before, had butchered the entire tribe of Nahals—

women and children—higher up in the hills.

As had been planned, some of the decoits had come as recruits to the Pindari standard. This created no suspicion, because free-lance soldiers, adventurous spirits, from all over India, flocked to a force that was known to be massed for the purpose of loot. It was an easy service; little discipline, a regular Moslem fighting horde, holding little in reverence but the daily prayer and the trim of a spear, or the edge of a sword. Amir Khan was the law, the army regulation, the one thing to obey. As to the matter of prayers, for those who were not followers of the Prophet, who carried no little prayer carpet to kneel upon, face to Mecca, there was, it being a Rajput town, the always shrine of Shiva and his elephant-headed son, Ganesh, to receive obeisance from the Hindus. And those who had come as players, wrestlers, were welcomed joyously, for, there being no immediate matter of a raid and throat-cutting, and little of disciplinary duties, time hung heavy on the hands of these grown-up children.

Hunsa was remembered by several of the Pindaris as having ridden with them before; and he also had suffered an apostasy of faith, for he now swore by the beard of the Prophet, and turned out at the call of the *muezzin*, and testified to the fact that there was but one god—Allah.

And he had known his Amir Khan well when he had told the Dewan that the fierce Pindari was gentle enough when it came to a matter of feminine beauty, for Bootea made an impression.

Of course, it would have taken a more obdurate male than Amir Khan not to appreciate the exquisite charm of the Gulab; no art could have equaled the inherent patrician simplicity and sweetness of her every thought and action. Perhaps her determination to ingratiate herself into the good graces of the chief was intensified, brought to a finer perfection, by the motive that had really instigated her to accept this terrible mission, her love for the Englishman, Barlow.

Of course, this was not an unusual thing; few women have lived who are not capable

of such a sacrifice for some "grand passion," when it comes, and rarely out of reasoning, smothers everything in the heart of almost every woman—once. It had come to Bootea. Foolishly, impossible of attainment, everything against its ultimate accomplished happiness, but nothing of that mattered. She was there, waiting—waiting for the service that Fate had whispered into her being.

And she danced divinely—that is the proper word for it. Her dancing was a revelation to Amir Khan, who had seen *nautchnis* go through their sensuous, suggestive, voluptuous twistings of supple forms, disfigured by excessive decoration—bangles, anklets, nose rings, high-colored swirling robes, and with voices worn to a rasping timbre that shrilled rather than sang the *ghazal* (love song) as they gyrated. But here was something different. Bootea's art was the art that was taught princesses in the palaces of the Rajput rajahs, not the bidding of a courtesan for the desire of a man. Her dress was a floating cloud of gauzy muslin, and her sole evident adornment the ruby-headed gold snake-bracelet, the iron band of widowhood being concealed higher on her arm. Some intuition had taught the girl that this mode would give rise in the warrior's heart to a feeling of respectful liking; it had always been that way with real men where she was concerned.

When Amir Khan passed an order that Bootea was to be treated as a queen, his officers smiled in their heavy black beards and whispered that his two wives would yet be hand-maidens to a third, the favorite.

Hunsa saw all this, for he was the one that often carried a message to the Gulab that her presence was desired in the palace. But there were always others there, the players and musicians—those who played the guitar and the violin—and the officers.

Hunsa was getting impatient. Every time he looked at the handsome, black-bearded head of the warrior he was like a covetous thief gazing upon a diamond necklace that is almost within his grasp. He had come there to kill him and delay was dangerous. He had been warned by the Dewan that they suspected Barlow meant

to visit the chief on behalf of the British. He might turn up any day. When he spoke to Bootea about her part in the mission, the enticing of Amir Khan to her tent so that he might be killed, she answered:

"Hunsa, you will wait until I give you a command to kill the chief. If you do not, it is very likely that you will be the sacrifice, for he is not one to be driven." She vowed that if he broke this injunction she would denounce him to Amir Khan. She would have done so at first but for the idea that treachery to her people could not be justified but by dire necessity.

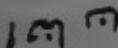
Every day the Gulab, as she walked through the crowded street, scanned the faces of men afoot and on horseback, looking for one clothed as a Patan, but in his eyes the something she would know, the something that would say he was the deified one. And she had told Amir Khan that there was a Patan coming with a message for him, and that when such an one asked for audience that he should say nothing, but see that he was admitted.

Then one day—it was about two weeks of waiting—Captain Barlow came. He was rather surprised at the readiness with which he was admitted for an audience with the chief. It was in the audience hall that he was received, and the chief was surrounded, as he sat on the rajah's dais, by officers.

Barlow had come as Ayub Alli, an Afghani, and as it was a private interview he desired, he made the visit a formal one, the paying of respects, with the usual presenting of the hilt of his sword for the chief to touch with the tips of his fingers in the way of accepting his respects.

The chief, knowing this was the one Bootea had spoken of, wrote on a slip of yellow paper something in Persian and tendered it to Barlow, saying, "This will be your passport when you would speak with me if there is in your heart something to be said."

Going, Barlow saw that he had written but the one word:



This, when translated into English, interpreted one word, "Afghan."

Hunsa, too, had watched for the coming of Barlow. The same whisper that had come to Bootea's ears that he would ride as a Patan had been told him by the Devan. Knowing that when Barlow arrived he would endeavor to see the chief in his quarters, Hunsa daily hovered near the palace and chatted with the guard at the gates, the heavy double teakwood gates, on one side of which was painted, on a white stone wall, a war elephant, and the other side a Rajput horseman, his spear held at the charge. This was the allegorical representation, so general all over Mewar, of Rana Pertab charging a Mogul prince mounted on an elephant.

Thus Hunsa had seen the tall Patan and heard him make the request for an audience with Amir Khan. It was the walk, the slight military precision, that caused the decoit to mutter, "No hill Afghan that."

And when Barlow had come forth the Bagree trailed him up through the *chowk*; and just as the man he followed came to the end of the narrow crowded way, Hunsa saw Bootea, coming from the opposite direction, suddenly stop, and her eyes go wide as they were fixed on the face of the tall Patan.

"It is the accursed *sahib*," Hunsa snarled between his grinding teeth. He brooded over the advent of the messenger, and racked his animal brain for some scheme to accomplish his mission of murder, and counteract the other's influence. And presently a bit of rare deviltry crept into his mind, joint partner with the murder thought. If he could but kill the chief and have the blame of it cast upon the *sahib*, who, no doubt, would have his interviews with Amir Khan alone.

During the time Hunsa had been there, several times in the palace, somewhat of a privileged character, known to be connected with the Gulab, he had familiarized himself with the plan of the marble building—the stairways that ran down to the central court, the many tortuous passages, the marble fretwork, screen niches and mysterious chambers.

Either Hunsa or Sookdee was now always trailing Barlow—his every move was known. And then, as if some evil jinni

had taken a spirit hand in the guidance of events, Hunsa's chance came. Barlow, who had tried three times to see Amir Khan, one day received a message at the gate that he was to come back that evening, when the chief, having said his prayers, would give him a private audience.

Hunsa had seen Barlow making his way from the *serai* where he camped with his horse toward the palace, and hurrying with the swift celerity of a jungle creature, he reached the gate first. His head wrapped in the folds of a turban so that his ugly face was all but hidden, he was talking to the guard when Barlow gave the latter his yellow slip of passport; and as the guard left his post and entered the dim entrance to call up the stairway for one to usher in the Afghan, Hunsa slipped nonchalantly through the gate and stood in the deep shadow of a jutting wall, his black body and drab loin-cloth merging into the gloom.

CHAPTER XX.

"THOU ART A MAN!"

"IS the one alone?" Amir Khan asked when a servant had presented Barlow's yellow slip of paper.

"But for the orderly that is with him."

"Tell him to enter, and go where your ears will remain safe upon your head."

The bearer withdrew and Captain Barlow entered, preceded by the orderly, who, with a deep salaam, announced:

"Sultan Amir Khan, it is Ayub Alli who would have audience." Then he stepped to one side, and stood erect against the wall.

"Salaam, chief," Barlow said with a sweep of a hand to his forehead, and Amir Khan from his seat in a black ebony chair inlaid with pearl shell and garnets, returned the salutation, asking: "And what favor would Ayub Alli ask?"

"A petition such as your servant would make is but for the ears of Amir Khan."

The black eyes of the Pindari, deep set under the shaggy eyebrows, hung upon the speaker's face with the fierce, watchful stab of a falcon's.

Barlow saw the distrust, the suspicion,

He unslung from his waist his heavy pistol took the *tulwar* from the wide, brass-studded belt about his waist, and tendered them to the orderly, saying: "It is a message of peace, but also it is alone for the ears of Amir Khan."

The Pindari spoke to the orderly: "Go thou and wait below."

When he had disappeared the Pindari rose from the ebony wood chair, stretched his tall, giant form, and laughed. "Thou art a seemly man, Ayub Alli, but thinkest thou that Amir Khan would have fear thou sendest thy playthings by the orderly?"

"No, chief, it was but proper. And you will know that the message is such that none other may hear it."

"Sit on yonder divan, Afghan, and tell this large thing that is in thy mind."

As Barlow took a seat upon the divan covered by a red and green Bokharan rug, lifting his eyes suddenly, he was conscious of a mocking smile on the Pindari's lips; and the fierce black eyes were watching his every move as he slipped a well-strapped sandal from a foot. Rising, he stepped to the table at one end of which the Pindari sat, and placing the sandal upon it, said: "If the chief will slit the double sole with his knife he will find within that which I have brought."

"The matter of which you spake, Afghan, is a service, and Amir Khan is not one to perform a service of the hands for any one."

"But if I asked for the chief's knife, not having one—"

"Inshalla! But thou art right. If thou hadst asked for the knife thou mightst have received it, and not in the sandal," he laughed. The laugh welled up from his throat through the heavy black beard like the bubble of a bison bull.

The Pindari reached for the sandal, and as he slit at the leather thread, he commented: "Thou hast the subtlety of a true Patan; within, I take it, is something of value, and if it were in a pocket of thy jacket, or a fold at thy waist, those who might seek it with one slit of their discoverer, which is a piece of broken glass carrying an edge such as no blade would have, would take it up. But a man's san-

dals well strapped on are removed but after he is dead."

"Bismillah!" The Pindari had the paper spread flat upon the black table and saw the seal of the British raj. He seemed to ponder over the document as if the writing were not within his interpretation. Then he said: "We men of the sword have not given much thought to the pen, employing scribblers for that purpose, but to-morrow a *mullah* will make this all plain."

Barlow interrupted the chief. "Shall I read the written word?"

"What would it avail? Hereon is the seal of the Englay raj, but as you read the thumb of the raj would not be upon your lip in the way of a seal. The *mullah* will interpret this to me. Is it of an alliance?"

"It is, chief."

The Pindari laughed: "Holkar would give me a camel load of gold rupees for this and thy head; Sindhia might add a province for the same."

"True, chief. And has Amir Khan heard a whisper of reward and a dress of honor from Sindhia's Dewan for his head?"

"Afghan, there is always a reward for the head of Amir Khan; but a gift is of little value to a man who has lost his life in the trying. Without are guards ready to run a sword through even a shadow, and here I could kill three."

He raised his black eyes and scanned the form of Ayub Alli. There was a quizzical smile on his lips as he said:

"Go back and sit thee upon the divan."

When Barlow had taken his place, the chief laughed aloud, saying, "Well done, Captain Sahib; thou art perfect as a Patan; even to the manner of sitting down one would have thought that, except for a saddle, thou hadst always sat upon thy heels."

Barlow smiled good humoredly, saying, "It is even so; I am Captain Barlow. And this"—he tapped the loose, baggy trousers of the Afghan hillman, and the sheepskin coat with the wool inside—"was not in the way of deceit, but for protection on the road."

"It is well thought of," the Pindari declared, "for a *sahib* traveling alone through Rajasthan would be robbed by a Mahratta

or killed by a Rajput. But as to the deceiving of Amir Khan, dost thou suppose that he given to a Patan the paper of admittance, or of passing, such as he gave to thee. Even at the audience I was pleased with thy manner of disguise."

Barlow was startled. "Did you know then that I was a *sahib*—how did you know?"

"Because thou wert placed in my hand in the way of protection."

Then Barlow surmised that of all outside his own caste there could be but one, and he knew that she was in the camp, for he had seen her. "It was a woman."

"A rare woman; even I, chief of the Pindaris—and we are not bred to softness—say that she is a pearl."

"They call her the Gulab," Barlow ventured.

"She is well named the Gulab. The perfume of her is in my nostrils, though it mixes ill with the camel smell. Without offense to Allah I can retain her, for it is in the Koran that a man may have four wives, and I have but two."

"But the Gulab is of a different faith," Barlow objected, and a chill hung over his heart.

The Pindari laughed. "The *sahibs* have agents for the changing of faith, those who wear the black coat of honor; and a *mullah* will soon make a good Mussemani of the beautiful little infidel. Of course, *sahib*, there is the other way of having a man's desire which is the way of all Pindaris—they consider women as fair loot when the sword is the passport through a land. But as to the Gulab, the flower is most too fair for a crushing. In such a matter as I have spoken of the fragrance is gone, and a man, when he crushes the weak, has conflict with himself."

"It's a topping old barbarian, this leader of cutthroats!" Barlow admitted to himself; but in his mind was a horror of the fate meant for the girl. And somehow it was a sacrifice for him, he knew, an enlargement of the love that had shown in the soft, brown eyes. As he listened schemes of stealing the Gulab away, of saving her, were hurtling through his brain.

"And mark thee, *sahib*, Amir Khan has

found favor with the little flower, for when I thought of an audience with her in her own tent—for to be a leader of men, in possession of two wives, and holding strong by the faith of Mahomet, it is as well to be circumspect—the Gulab warned me that a knife might be presented as I slept. A jealous lover, perhaps, I think—it would not have been Ayub Alli, by any chance?"

What Barlow was thinking, was: "A most subtle animal, this." And he now understood why the Pindari, as if he had forgotten the message, was talking of the Gulab. As an Oriental, he was coming to the point in circles.

"It was not, chief," Barlow answered. "A British officer on matters of state would break his honor if he trifled with women."

"Put thy hand upon thy beard, Afghan—though thou hast not one—and swear by it that it was not thee the woman meant when she spoke of a knife, for I like thee."

Barlow put his hand to his chin. "I swear that there was nothing of evil intent against Amir Khan in my heart," he said, "and that is the same as our oath, for it is but one God that we both worship."

The chief again let float from his big throat his low, deep, musical laugh.

"An oath is an oath, nothing more. To trust to it and go to sleep in its guardianship, one may never wake up. Even the gods cannot bind a heart that is black with words. It was one of my own name who swore on the shrine of Eklinga at Udaipur friendship for a prince of Marwar, and changed turbans with him, which is more binding than eating opium together, then slew him like a dog. Of my faith, an oath, by the beard of the Prophet, is more binding I think. Too many gods, such as the men of Hind have, produce a wavering. But thou hast sworn to the truth as I am a witness. The delay of an audience was that thou mightst be well watched before much had been said, for a child at play hides nothing, and if thou hadst gone but once to the tent of the Gulab, Amir Khan would have known."

"But as to this"—his hand tapped the document—"it has been said that the British raj doles out the lives of its servants as one doles grain in a time of famine. If an

envoy, such as a sahib sends to a way of pride, came with this, and were made a matter of sacrifice, perhaps twenty lives would have paid off the trying, but as it is, but one is the account."

Barlow shot a quick, searching look into the Pindari's eyes. Was it a covert threat? But he answered: "It is even so; it was spoken of as a matter for two, but—"

The chief laughed. "I know, *sahib*, thou art pleasing to me. Of the *sahibs* I have little knowledge, but I have heard it said they were a race of white Rajputs, save that they did not kill a brother or a father for the love of killing. What service want they of Amir Khan?"

"There are rumors that the Mahrattas, forgetting the lessons they have received—both Holkar and Sindhia having been thoroughly beaten by the British—are secretly preparing for war."

"A *johur*, a last death rush, is it not?"

"They will be smashed forever, and their lands taken."

"But the King of Oudh has been promised a return to glory to join in this revolt. The fighting Rajputs—what of them? Backed by the English they should hold these accursed black Mahrattas in check."

Barlow rose, and, the wary eyes of the chief on every move, stepped over to the table and pointed to a signature upon the document.

"That," he said, "is the signature of the Rana of Mewar, meaning that he also passes the salt of friendship to Amir Khan."

He turned the document over, and there, written upon it, were the figures "74½."

"*Bismillah!*" the chief cried, for he had not noticed this before. "It is the *tilac*, the rana's sealing of the document; it is the mystic number that means that the contents are sacred, that the Curse of the Sack of Fort Chitor be upon him who violates the seal; it is the oath of all Rajputs—*tilac*, that which is forbidden. And the *sahibs* have heard a rumor that Amir Khan has a hundred thousand horsemen to cut in with. Even Sindhia is afraid of me and desires my head. The *sahibs* have heard, and desire my friendship."

"That is true, chief."

"This is the right way," and the Pindari brought his palm down upon the government message. "I have heard men say that the English were like children in the matter of knowing nothing but the speaking of truth; I have heard some laugh at this, accounting it easy to circumvent an enemy when one has knowledge of all his intentions, but truth is strength. We have faith in children because they have not yet learned the art of a lie. In two days, Captain Sahib, thou wilt be called to an audience." He rose from his chair, and, with a hand to his forehead, said: "Salaam, *sahib*. May the protection of Allah be upon you!"

"Salaam, chief," Barlow answered, and he held out a hand with a boyish frankness that caused the Pindari to grasp it, and the two stood, two men looking into each other's eyes.

"Go thou now, *sahib*; thou art a man. Go alone and with quiet, for I would view this message and put it in yonder strongbox before others enter."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GHOUL.

WHEN Captain Barlow had gone Amir Khan took up the message and read it. Once he chuckled, for it was, in his Oriental mind, that the deceiving of Barlow as to his knowledge of writing was rather a joke. Once as he read the heavy silk *purdah* of the door swayed a little at one side as if a draft of wind had shifted it, and an evil face appeared in the opening.

Presently he rose from his chair, took the lamp in one hand and the paper in the other, and crossed to the iron box in a far corner of the room. He set the flickering light upon the floor, and dropping to his knees, drew from his waist band a silver chain, at the end of which were his seal and keys. His broad shoulders blanked the tiny cone of light, and behind, through a marble fretwork, a delicate tracery of lotus flowers that screened the window, trickled cold shafts of moonlight that fell upon something evil that wriggled across the white and black slabs of marble from

beneath the door curtain. The moonlight glistened the bronze skin of the silent, crawling thing that was a huge snake, or a giant centipede; it was even like a square-snouted, shovel-headed *mugger* that had crept up out of the slimy river that circled sluggishly the eastern wall of the palace.

Once as Amir Khan fitted a key in the lock he checked and knelt, as silent, as passive as a bronze Buddha, listening; and the creeping thing was but a blur, a shadow without movement, silent. Then he raised the lid of the box and paused, holding it with his right hand, the flickering light upon his bronze face showing a smile as his eyes dwelt lovingly upon the gold and jewels within.

And again the thing crept, or glided, not even a slipping purr, noiseless, just a drifting shadow; only where a ribbon of moonlight from between a lotus and a leaf picked it out was the brown thing of evil marked against the marble. Then the divan blurred it from sight. From behind the divan to the ebony chair, and the wide, black-topped table the shadow drifted; and when Amir Khan had clanged the iron lid closed, and risen, lamp in hand, there was nothing to catch his eye.

He placed the lamp that was fashioned like a lotus upon the table, and dropping into his chair, yawned sleepily. Then he raised his voice to call his bearer:

"Abd—"

The name died on his lips, for the brown thing behind the chair had slipped upward with the silent undulation of a panther, and a deadly *roomal*—towel—had flashed over the chief's head and was now a strangling knot about his tawny throat; the knuckles of Hunsa were kneading his spine at the back of the skull with a half twist of the cloth. He was pinioned to the back of the chair; he was in a vise, the jaws of which closed his throat. Just a stifled gurgle escaped from his lips as his hand clutched at a dagger hilt. The muscles of the naked, brown body behind stood out in knobs of strength, and the face of the strangler, panreddened teeth showing in the flickering light as if they had bitten into blood, was the face of a ghoul.

The powerful Pindari struggled in smooth-

ering desperation, and Hunsa, twisting the gorilla hands, sought in vain to break the neck, but it was too strong.

Then the chair careened sidewise, and the Pindari shot downward, his forehead striking a marble slab, stunning him. Hunsa, with the death grip still on the *roomal*, planted a knee between the victim's shoulder blades, and jerked the head upward. Still the spine did not snap, and slowly tightening the pressure of the cloth, he smothered the man beneath his knee till he felt the muscles go slack and the body lie limp—dead!

Then Hunsa crossed the *roomal* to his left hand, and stretching out his right, grasped the chief's dagger where he lay upon the floor, and drove it, from behind, through his heart. He placed the knife upon the floor where drops of blood, trickling from its curved point, lay upon the white marble like spilled rubies. He unfastened the silver chain that carried the keys and crossed the floor with the slouching crouch of a hyena. Rapidly he opened the iron box, took the paper Amir Khan had placed there, and hesitated for a second, his ghoulish eyes gloating over the jewels and gold; but he did not touch them, his animal cunning holding him to the simple plan that was now working so smoothly. He locked the box and slipped the key chain about the dead man's waist; then, seizing the right hand of his victim he smeared the thumb in blood and imprinted it upon the paper just beside the seal of the British raj, muttering: "This will do for Nana Sahib as well as your head, Pindari, and is much easier hidden."

He placed the paper in a roll of his turban, blew out the flickering light, and with noiseless bare feet glided cautiously to the door. The *purdah* swung back and there was left just the silent room, all dark, save for little trickles of silver that dropped spots and grotesque lines upon the body of the dead chief. It fell full upon the knife flooding its blade into a fingerlike mirror, and glinted the blood drops as if in reality they had turned to rubies. Without the *purdah* Hunsa did not crouch and run, but walked swiftly, though noiselessly, as one upon a message. Ten paces of the dim-

lighted hall he turned to the right to a balcony.

Here, at the top of a narrow, winding, stone stairway, Hunsa listened. No sound came from below, and he glided down. Beneath was a balcony corresponding with the one above, and just beyond was a domed cell that he had investigated. It was a cell that at one time had witnessed the quick descent of headless bodies to the river below. A teakwood beam with a round hole in the center spanned the cell just above an opening that had all the appearance of a well. Hunsa had investigated this exit for this very purpose, for he had been somewhat of a privileged character about the palace.

He now unslung from about his waist, hidden by his baggy trousers, a strong, fine line of camel hair. Making one end fast to the teakwood sill he went down hand over hand, his strong, hard palms gripping the soft line. At the end of it he still had a drop of ten or twelve feet, but, bracing his shoulders to one wall, and his feet to the other, he let go. Hunsa was shaken by his drop of a dozen feet, but the soft sand of the river bed had broken the shock of his fall. He picked himself up, and crouching in the hiding shadow of the bank hurried along for fifty yards; then he clambered up cautiously to the waste of white sand that was studded with the tents of the Pindari horsemen. On his right, floating up the hill in terraces, its marble white in the moonlight, was the palace where Amir Khan lay dead. It still held a somber quietude; the murder had not been discovered.

He had mapped this route out carefully in the day, and knew just how to avoid the patrolling guards, and he was back in the narrow *chowk* of the town that was a struggling stream of swaggering Pindaris, and darker skinned Marwari bunnias and shopkeepers. Hunsa pushed his way through this motley crowd and continued on to the gate of the palace.

To the guard who halted him he said: "If the other who went up to see the chief is gone, I would go now, *meer sahib*. As I have said, it is a message from the Gulab Begum."

"I looked for you when I returned from above," the guard answered, "but you had gone. The Afghan has gone but a little since—stay you here."

He called within, "Yacoub!"

It was the orderly who had conducted Barlow to Amir Khan who answered, and to him the guard said: "Go to the chief's apartment and say that one waits here with word from the favorite."

Hunsa sat down nonchalantly upon a marble step, and drew the guard into a talk of raids, explaining that he had ridden once upon a time with Chitu, on his foray into the territory of the Nizam.

CHAPTER XXII.

THEY BRING THE AFGHAN!

HUNSA had come back to the palace in haste so that the murder of Amir Khan might be discovered soon after Captain Barlow had left, and that the crime might be fastened upon the *sahib*. As he waited, chatting to the guard, there was suddenly a frenzied, deep-throated call of alarm from the upper level of rooms that was answered by other voices here and there crying out; there was a hurrying scuffling of feet on the marble stairs, and Yacoub appeared, his eyes wide in fright, crying:

"The chief has been stabbed! He's dead! He's murdered! Guard the door—let no one out—let no one in!"

"Beat the *nakara*," the guard commanded. "Raise the alarm!"

He seized his long-barreled matchlock, blew on the fuse, and pointing up toward the moonlit sky, fired. Just within, in a little court, Yacoub, with heavy drum stick, was pounding from the huge drum a thunderous vibrant roar, and somebody at his command had seized a horn, and from its copper throat a strident shriek of alarm split the air.

The narrow street was now one surging mass of excited Pindaris. With their riding whips they slashed viciously at any one other than their own soldier caste that ventured near, driving them out, crying: "This is alone for the Pindaris!"

A powerful, whiskered jamadar pushed his way through the mob, throwing men to the right and left with sweeps of his strong arm, and, reaching the guard, was told that Amir Khan lay up in his room, murdered. Then an *hazari* (commander of five thousand) came running and pushed through the throng that the full force of the tragedy held almost silent.

The guard saluted, saying: "Commander Kassim, the chief has been slain."

"How—who?"

"I know not, commander."

"Who has passed the guard here?"

"But one, the Afghan, who was expected by the chief. He went forth but lately."

"A Patan!" Kassim roared. "Trust a woman and a snake, but not a Patan." He turned to the whiskered jamadar: "Quick, go you with men and bring the Afghan." To another he said: "Command to enter from there"—his hand swept the mob in front—"a dozen trusty *sowars* and flood the palace with them. Up, up, every room, every nook, every place of hiding; under everything, and above everything, and through everything, search. Not even let there be exemption of the *seraglio*—murder lurks close to women at all times. Seize every servant that is within and bind him; let none escape."

He swept a hand out toward the Pindaris in the street that were like a pack of wolves. "Up the hill—surround the palace! And guard every window and rat-run!"

The guard saluted, venturing: "Commander, none could have entered from outside to do the foul deed."

"Liar! Lazy sleeper!" He smashed with his foot the *hookah* that sat on the marble floor, its long stem coiled like a snake. "While you busied over such, and opium, one has slipped by."

He reached out a powerful hand and seized the shoulder of a Pindari and jerked him to the step, commanding: "Stay here with this monkey of the tall trees, and see that none pass. I go to the chief. When the Afghan comes have him brought up."

Hunsa had stood among the Pindaris, shoved hither and thither as they surged

back and forth. Once the flat of a *tulwar* had smote him across the back, but when he turned his face to the striker who recognized him as a man of privilege, one of the amusers, he was allowed to remain.

The startling cry: "The chief has been murdered! The Sultan is dead!" swept out over the desert sand that lay white in the moonlight, and the night air droned with the hum of fifty thousand voices that was like the song of a world full of bees. And the night palpitated with the beat of horses' feet upon the hard sand and against the stony ford of the parched river as the Pindari horsemen swept to Rajgar as if they rode in the sack of a city.

Hoarse, full-throated cries calling the curse of Allah upon the murderer were like a deep-voiced hymn of hate—it was continuous.

The *bunnias*, and the oilmen, and the keepers of cookshops, hid their wares and crept into dark places to hide. The flickering oil lamps were blotted out; but some of the Pindaris had fastened torches to their long spears, and the fluttering lights waved and circled like shooting stars.

Rajgar was a Sheol; it was as if from the teak forests and the jungles of wild mango had rushed its full holding of tigers, and leopards, and elephants, and screaming monkeys.

Soon a wedge of cavalry, a dozen wild-eyed horsemen, pushed their way through the struggling mob, at their head the jamadar bellowing: "Make way—make the road clean of your bodies."

"They bring the Afghan!" somebody cried and pointed to where Barlow sat strapped to the saddle of his Beluchi mare.

"It is the one who killed the chief!" another yelped; and the cries rippled along from mouth to mouth; *tulwars* flashed in the light of the lurid torches as they swept upward at the end of long arms threateningly. But the jamadar roared: "Back, back! You're like jackals snapping and snarling. Back! If the one is killed how shall we know the truth?"

One, an old man, yelled triumphantly: "Allah be praised! A wisdom—a wisdom! The torture, the horse-bucket and the hot ashes! The jamadar will have the truth

out of the Afghan. Allah be praised! It is a wisdom!"

At the gate straps were loosed and Barlow was jerked to the marble steps as if he had been a blanket stripped from the horse's back.

"It is *the* one, jamadar," the guard declared, thrusting his face into Barlow's. "It is the Afghan. Beyond doubt there will be blood upon his clothes—look to it, jamadar."

"We found the Afghan in the *serai*, and he was attending to his horse as if about to fly; beyond doubt he is the murderer of our chief," one who had ridden with the jamadar said.

"Bring the murderer face to face with his foul deed," the jamadar commanded, and clasped by both arms, pinioned, Barlow was pushed through the gate and into the dim-lighted hall. In the scuffle of the passing Hunsa sought to slip through, impelled by a devilish fascination to hear all that would be said in the death chamber. If the case against the *sahib* were short and decisive—perhaps they might slice him into ribbons with their swords—Hunsa would then have nothing to fear, and need not attempt flight.

But the guard swept him back with the butt of his long smooth bore, crying: "Dog, where go you?" Then he saw that it was Hunsa, the messenger of his chief's favorite—as he took the Gulab to be—and he said: "You cannot enter, Hunsa. It is a matter for the jamadars alone."

At that instant the Gulab slipped through the struggling groups in the street, the Pindaris gallantly making way for her. She had heard of the murder of the chief, and had seen the dragging in of the Afghan through the struggling mob.

"Let me go up, guard," she pleaded.

"It is a matter for men," he objected. "The jamadar would be angry, and my sword and gun would be taken away and I should be put to scrub the legs of horses if I let you pass."

"The jamadar will not be angry," she pleaded, "for there is something to be said which only I have knowledge of. It was spoken to me by the chief. He had fear of this Afghan, and, please, in the name of

Allah, let Hunsa by, for, being alone, I have need of him."

The soft, dark eyes pleaded stronger than the girl's words, and the guard yielded, half reluctantly. To the young Pindari, he said, "Go you with these two, and if the jamadar is for cutting off their heads, say that those in the street pulled me from the doorway, and these slipped through; I have no fancy for the compliment of a sword on my neck."

In the dim hallway two men stood guarding the door to the chief's chamber, and when the man who had taken the Gulab explained her mission, one of them said, "Wait you here. I will ask of Kassim his pleasure."

Presently the guard returned. "The commander will see the woman, but if it is a matter of trifling let the penalty fall upon the guard below. The mingling of women in an affair of men is an abomination in the sight of Allah."

When Bootea entered the chamber she gave a gasping cry of horror. The chief lay upon the floor, face downward, just as he had dropped when slain, for Kassim had said: "Amir Khan is dead, may Allah take him to his bosom, and such things as we may learn of his death may help us to avenge our chief. Touch not the body."

Her entrance was not more than half observed, for Kassim at that moment was questioning the Afghan, who stood, a man on either side of him, and two behind.

He was just answering a question from the commander and was saying: "I left your chief with the peace of Allah upon both our heads, for he gripped my hand in fellowship, and said that we were two men. Why should I slay one such who was veritably a soldier, who was a follower of Mahomet?"

The man who had brought Barlow up to Amir Khan when he came for the audience, said: "Commander, I left this one, the Afghan, here with the chief, and took with me his sword and the short gun; he had no weapons."

"*Inshalla!* It was but a pretense," the commander declared, "a pretense to gain the confidence of the chief, for he was slain with his own knife. It was a Patan trick."

The commander turned to the Afghan.

"Why hadst thou audience with the chief alone and at night here—what was the mission?"

Barlow hesitated. A slight hope that might save his own life would be to declare himself as a *sahib* and his mission; but he felt sure that the chief had been murdered because of this very thing, that somebody, an agent of Nana Sahib, had waited hidden, had killed the chief and taken the paper. To speak of it would be to start a rumor that would run across India that the British had negotiated with the Pindaris, and if the paper weren't found there—which it wouldn't be—he wouldn't be believed. Better to accept the roll of the dice as they lay, that he had lost, and die as an Afghan rather than as an Englishman, a spy, who had killed their chief.

"Speak, Patan," Kassim commanded; "thou dwellest overlong upon some lie."

"There was a mission," Barlow answered. "It was from my own people, the people of Sind."

"Of Sindhia?"

"No; from the land of Sind, Afghanistan. We ride not with the Mahrattas; they are infidels, while we be followers of the true Prophet."

"Thou art a fair speaker, Afghan. And was there a sealed message?"

"There was, Commander Sahib."

"Where is it now?"

"I know not. It was left with Amir Khan."

There was a hush of three seconds. Then Kassim, whose eye had searched the room, saw the iron box. "This has a bearing upon matters," he declared; this affair of a written message. "Open the box and see if it is within," he commanded a Pindari.

"How now, woman?" for the Gulab had stepped forward. "What dost thou here—ah! There was talk of a message from the chief. It might be, it might be, because"—his leonine face, full whiskered, the face of a wild rider, a warrior, softened as he looked at the slight figure—"our noble chief had spoken soft words of thee, and passed the order that thou wert Begum, that whatsoever thou desired was to be."

"Commander," Bootea said, and her

voice was like her eyes, trembling, vibrant, "let me look upon the face of Amir Khan; then there are things to be said that will avenge his death in the sight of Allah."

Kassim hesitated. Then he said, "It matters not—we have the killer." And reverently, with his own hands, he turned the chief on his back, saying softly, "In the name of Allah, thou restest better thus."

The Gulab, kneeling, pushed back the black beard with her hand, and they thought she was making oath upon the beard of the slain man. Then she rose to her feet, and spoke to Kassim:

"There is one without—Hunsa. Bring him here, and see that there is no weapon upon him."

Kassim passed an order and Hunsa was brought, his evil eyes turning from face to face with the restless query of a caged leopard.

"There is no paper, Commander Sahib," the jamadar said, returning from his search of the iron box.

"There was none such," Kassim growled. "It was but a Patan lie; the message is yonder," and he pointed to the smear of blood upon the marble floor.

Then he turned to Bootea. "Now, woman, speak what is in thy mind, for this is an affair of action."

"Commander Sahib," Bootea began, "yonder man"—and she pointed a slim hand toward Barlow—"is not an Afghan; he is a *sahib*."

This startling announcement filled the room with cries of astonishment and anger; *tulwars* flashed. Barlow shivered, not because of the impending danger, for he had accepted the roll of the dice, but at the thought that Bootea was betraying him, that all she had said and done before was nothing—a lie, that she was an accomplice in this murder of the chief, and was now giving the Pindaris the final convincing proof, the reason.

To deny the revelation was useless; they would torture him, and he was to die anyway; better to die claiming to be a messenger from the British rather than as one sent to murder the chief.

Kassim bellowed an order subduing the

tumult, then he asked, "What am I—*a Patan*, or as the woman says, an *Egyptian*?"

"I am a *sahib*," Barlow answered, "a captain in the British service, and came to your chief with a written message of friendship."

Kassim pointed to the blood on the floor. "Thou wert a good messenger, infidel; thou hast slain a follower of the Prophet."

But Bootea raised a slim hand, and, her voice trembling with intensity, cried: "Commander, Amir Khan was not slain with the dagger; he was killed by the towel. Look you at his throat, and you will see the mark."

"Bismillah!" came in a cry of astonishment from the commander's throat, and the marble walls of the *surya-mahal* (room of audience) echoed gasps and curses. Kassim himself had knelt by the dead chief, and now rising, said: "By Allah! It is true. That dog—" His finger was thrusting like a dagger at Barlow.

But Bootea's clear voice hushed the rising clamor. "No, commander, the *sahibs* know not the thug trick of the *roomal*, and few thugs could have overcome the chief."

"Who, then, killed him—speak quick, and with the truth," Kassim commanded.

He was interrupted by one of Hunsa's guards, crying: "Here, where go you? You had not leave!" And Hunsa, who had turned to slip away, was jerked back to where he had stood.

"It is that one," Bootea declared, sweeping a hand toward Hunsa. "About his waist is even now the yellow and white *roomal* that is the weapon of Bhowanee. With that he killed Amir Khan. Take it from him, and see if there be not black hairs from the beard of the chief in its soft mesh."

"By the grace of Allah it is a truth!" the commander ejaculated when the cloth passed to him had been examined. "It is a revelation such as came to Mahomet, and out of the mouth of a woman. Great is Allah!"

"Will the commander have Hunsa searched for the paper the *sahib* has spoken of?" Bootea asked.

"In his turban," Kassim commanded. "In his turban, the nest of a thief's loot

or the hiding place of the knife of a murderer. Look ye in his turban!"

As the turban was stripped from the head of Hunsa the Pindari gave it a whirling twist that sent its many yards of blue muslin streaming out like a ribbon, and the parchment message fell to the floor.

"Ah-ha!" and a man, stooping, thrust it into the hands of the commander.

The Pindari who held the turban threw it almost at the feet of Bootea, saying, "Methinks the slayer will need this no more."

Bootea picked up the blue cloth and rolled it into a ball, saying, "If it is permitted I will take this to those who entrusted Hunsa with this foul mission to show them that he is dead."

"A clever woman thou art—it is a wise thought; take it by all means, for indeed that dog's head will need little when they have finished with him," the soldier agreed.

Kassim had taken the written paper closer to the light. At sight of the thumb bloodstain upon the document, he gave a bellow of rage. "Look you all!" he cried, holding it spread out in the light of the lamp. "Here is our chief's message to us given after he was dead. He sealed it with his thumb in his own blood, after he was dead. A miracle, calling for vengeance. Hunsa, dog, thou shalt die for hours—thou shalt die by inches, for it was thee."

Kassim held the paper at arm's length toward Barlow, asking: "Is this the message thou brought?"

"It is, commander."

Kassim whirled on Hunsa. "Where didst thou get it, dog of an infidel?"

"Without the gate of the palace, my lord. I found it lying there where the *sahib* dropped it in his flight."

"Allah! Thou art a liar of brazeness." He spoke to a jamadar. "Have brought the leather nosebag of a horse and hot ashes so that we may come by the truth."

Then Kassim held the parchment close to the lamp and scanned it. He rubbed a hand across his wrinkled brow and pondered. "Beside the seal here is the name, Rana Bhi," and he turned his fierce eyes on Barlow.

"Yes, commander; the rana has put his

seal upon it that he will join his Rajputs with the British and the Pindaris to drive from Mewar Sindhia—the one whose Deewan sent Hunsa to slay your chief."

"Thou sayst so, but how know I that Hunsa is not in thy hand, and that thou didst not prepare the way for the killing. Here beside the name of the rana is drawn a lance; that suggests an order to kill, a secret order." He turned to a sepoy. "Bring the Rajput, Zalim."

While they waited Bootea said: "It was Nana Sahib who sent Hunsa and the decoits to slay Amir Khan, because he feared an alliance between the chief and the British."

"And thou wert one of them?"

"I came to warn Amir Khan, and—"

"And what, woman? The decoits were your own people?"

"Yonder *sahib* had saved my life—saved me from the harem of Nana Sahib, and I came to save his life and your chief's."

Now there was an eruption into the chamber, men carrying a great pot of hot ashes, and one swinging from his hand the nosebag of a horse; and with them was the Rajput.

"Here," Kassim said, addressing the Hindu, "what means this spear upon this document? Is it a hint to drive it home?"

Zalim put his finger reverently upon the rana's signature. "That, commander, is the seal, the sign. I am a Chondawat, and belong to the highest of the thirty-six tribes of Mewar, and that sign of the lance was put upon state documents by Chonda. It has been since that time—it is but a seal. Even as that"—and Zalim proudly swung a long arm toward the wall where a huge yellow sun embossed on gypsum rested—"even that is an emblem of the Children of the Sun, the Sesodias of Mewar, the rana."

"It is well," Kassim declared. "As to this that is in the message, to-morrow, with the aid of a *mullah*, we will consider it. And now, as to Hunsa, we would have from him the truth."

He turned to the Gulab. "Go thou in peace, woman, for our dead chief had high regard for thee. And Captain Sahib, even thou may go to thy abode, not thinking to

leave there, however, without coming to pay salaams. Thou wouldst not get far."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I WILL TELL WHAT I KNOW!"

WHEN the two had gone Kassim clapped his hands together. "Now then, for the ordeal, the search for truth," he declared.

Hot wood ashes were poured into the nosebag, and, protesting, cursing, struggling, the powerful Bagree was dragged to the center of the room.

"Who sent thee to murder Amir Khan?" Kassim asked.

"Before Bhowanee, prince, I did not kill him!"

At a wave of Kassim's hand upward the bag of ashes was clapped over the decoit's head, and he was pounded on the back to make him breathe in the deadly dust. Then the bag was taken off, and gasping, reeling, he was commanded to speak the truth. Once Kassim said: "Dog, this is but gentle means; torches will be bound to thy fingers and lighted. The last thing that will remain to thee will be thy tongue, for we have need of that to utter the truth."

Three times the nosebag was applied to Hunsa, like the black cap over the head of a condemned murderer, and the last time, rolling on the floor in agony, his lungs on fire, his throat choked, his eyes seared like hot coals, he gasped that he would confess if his life were spared.

"Dog!" Kassim snarled. "Thy life is forfeit, but the torture will cease; it is reward enough—speak!"

But the Bagree had the obstinate courage of a bulldog; the nerves of his giant physical structure were scarce more vibrant than those of a bull; as to the torture it was but a question of a slower death. But his life was something to bargain for. Half dead from the choking of his lungs, with an animal cunning he thought of this. It was the one dominant idea in his numbed brain. As he lay, his mighty chest pumping its short, staccato gasps, Commander Kassim said, "Bring the dog of an infidel water that he may tell the truth."

When water had been poured down the Bagree's throat, he rolled his bloodshot eyes beseechingly toward the commander, and in a voice scarce beyond a hoarse whisper, said: "If you do not kill me, prince, I will tell what I know."

"Tell it, dog, then die in peace," Kassim snarled.

But Hunsa shook his gorilla head, and answered, "Bhowanee help me, I will not tell. If I die, I die with my spirit cast at thy shrine."

Kassim stamped his foot in rage; and a jamadar roared: "Tie the torches to the infidel's fingers; we will have the truth."

Half a dozen Pindaris darted forward, and poised in waiting for the command to bind to the fingers of the Bagree oil-soaked torches. But Kassim waved them back, and stood, his brow wrinkled in pondering, his black eyes sullenly fixed on the face of the Bagree. Then he said: "What this dog knows is of more value to our whole people, considering the message that has been brought, than his worthless life that is but the life of a swine."

He took a turn pacing the marble floor, and with his eyes called a jamadar to one side. "These thugs, when they cast themselves in the protection of Kali, die like fanatics, and this one is but an animal. Torture will not bring the truth. Mark you, jamadar, I will make the compact with him. Do not lead an objection, but trust me."

"But the dead chief, commander—"

"Yes, because of him; he loved his people. And the knowledge that yon dog has he would not have sacrificed."

"But is Amir Khan to be unavenged?" the jamadar queried.

"Allah will punish yonder infidel for the killing of one of the true faith. Go and summon the officers from below and we will decide upon this."

Soon a dozen officers were in the room, and the *sowars* were sent away. Then Kassim explained the situation, saying: "A confession brought forth by torture is often a lie, the concoction of a mind crazed by pain. If this dog, who has more courage than feeling, sees the chance of his life he will tell us the truth."

But they expostulated, saying that if

they let him go free it would be a blot upon their name.

"The necessity is great," Kassim declared, "and this I am convinced is the only way. We may leave this punishment to Allah, for Allah is great. He will not let live one so vile."

Finally the others agreed with Kassim, who said that he would take the full onus upon himself for not slaying the murderer, that if there were blame let it be upon his head. Then he spoke to Hunsa: "This has been decided upon, dog, that if thou confess, reveal to us information that is of value to our people, the torture shall cease, and no man's hand in the whole Pindari camp shall be raised against thee, either to wound or take thy life."

"But the jail, Hazari Sahib?"

"No, dog, if thou but tell the truth in full, that we may profit, to-morrow you may go free, and if any man in the camp wounds you his life will pay for it. Till noon you may have for the going; even food for your start on the way back to the land of your accursed tribe. By the beard of the Prophet no man of all the Pindari force shall wound you. Now speak quick, for I have given a pledge."

There were murmurs among the jama-dars at Kassim's terms, for their hearts were full of hate for the creature who had slain their loved chief. But Kassim was a man famous for his intelligence. In all the councils Amir Khan had been swayed by the hazari's judgment. It was an accursed price to pay, they felt, but the chief was dead; to kill his slayer perhaps was not as great a thing as to have Hunsa's confession written and attested to. All that vast horde of fierce-riding Pindaris and Bundoolas had been gathered by Amir Khan with the object of being a power in the war that was brewing—the war in which the Mahrattas were striving for ascendancy and the British massing to crush the Mahratta horde. It had been Amir Khan's policy to strike with the winning force; perhaps his big body of hard-riding *sowars* being the very power that would throw the odds to one or other of the contenders. Their reward would be loot, unlimited loot, so dear to the heart of the Pindari, and an assign-

ment of territory. To know, beyond doubt, who had instigated the murder of the chief was precious knowledge. It might be, as the Gulab had said, Sindhia's Dewan, but there was the English officer there at that time; and the message of friendship may have been a message of deceit, and the true object the slaying of Amir Khan, who was looked upon as a great leader.

Hunsa had lay watching furtively the effect of the commander's words upon the others.

Then he spoke. "I will tell the truth, Hazari, for thou hast given a promise in the name of Allah that I am free of death at the hands of thy people."

"Wait, dog of an infidel!" Kassim commanded. "Quick, call the *mullah* to write the confession, for this is a sin to be washed out in much blood, and the proof must be at hand, so the guilty will have no plea for mercy. Also, it is a matter of secrecy. We here being officers will have it on our honor, and the *mullah*, because of his priesthood, will not speak of it. Also, he will bear witness of its sanctity."

Soon a Pindari announced: "Commander Sahib, here is the holy one," and at a word from Kassim the priest unrolled his sheets of yellow paper, and sitting cross-legged upon a cushion with a salaam to the dead chief, dipped his quill in a little ink horn and held it poised.

Then Hunsa, his eyes all the time furtively watching the scowling faces about him, fear and distrust in his heart over the gift of his life, but impelled by his knowledge that it was his only chance, narrated the story of Nana Sahib and the Dewan's scheme to rid the Mahrattas of the leader they feared, Amir Khan; told that they knew that the British were sending overtures for an alliance, but that fearing to kill the messenger—unless it could be done so secretly it would never be discovered—they had determined to remove the chief. When he spoke of the other Bagrees, Kassim realized that in the excitement of fixing the murder upon one there they had forgotten his troop associates, and a hurried order was passed for their capture.

Of course, it was too late; the others, at the first alarm, had slipped away.

CASTE.

When the confession was finished, Kassim commanded the *mullah* to rub his cube of India ink over the thumb of the decoit, and the mark was imprinted on the paper. Then he was taken to one of the cave cells cut out of the solid rock beneath the palace, and imprisoned for the night.

"Come, jamadars," Kassim said, and his voice that had been so coarse and rough, now broke, and sobs floated the words scarcely articulate, "and reverently let us lay Amir Khan upon his bed. Then, though there be no call of the *muazzin*, we will kneel here, even without our prayer carpets, and pray to Allah for the repose of the soul of a true Musselman and a great warrior. May his rest be one of peace!"

He passed his hand lovingly over the face of the chief and down his beard, and his strong, fearless eyes were wet.

Then Amir Khan was lifted by the jamadars and carried to a bed in the room that adjoined the *surya mahal*.

When they had risen from their silent prayer, Kassim said: "Go you to your tents. I will remain here with the guard who watch."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FREEDOM OF HUNSA.

CAPTAIN BARLOW and Bootea had gone from the scene of the murder through the long, dimly lighted hall, its walls broken here and there by niches of mystery, some of them closed by marble fretwork screens that might have been doors, and down the marble stairway, in silence. Barlow had slipped a hand under her arm in the way of both physical and mental sustaining. His fingers tapped her arm in affectionate approbation. Once he muttered to himself in English, "Splendid girl!" and not comprehending, the Gulab turned her star eyes upward to his face.

At the gate the soldier who had accompanied them spoke to the guard, and the latter, standing on a step, bellowed: "Ho, ye Pindaris, here goes forth the Afghan in innocence of the foul crime! Above they have the slayer, who was Hunsa the thug; and praise be to Allah! They will apply

the torture! Let him pass in peace; all safe! And take care that no one molest the beautiful Gulab. The peace of Allah upon the soul of the great Amir Khan!"

A rippling thunder of deep voices vibrated the thronged street, crying, "Allah Akbar! The peace of God be upon the soul of the dead chief!"

A lane was opened up to them by the grim, wild-eyed, bandit-looking horsemen, *tulwar* over shoulder and knives in belt, who called: "Back ye! The favored of the commander passes. Back, make way! 'Tis an order."

The faces of the soldiers that had been wreathed in revenge and blood lust when Barlow had been brought, were now friendly, and there were cries of "Salaam, brother! Salaam, flower of the desert!" for it had been spread that the Gulab had denounced the murderer, had denounced him.

"Brave little Gulab!" Barlow said in a low voice, bending his head to look into her eyes, for he felt the arm trembling against his hand.

She did not answer, and he knew that she was sobbing.

When they were past the turbulent crowd he said, "Bootea, your people will all have fled or been captured."

"Yes, *sahib*," she gasped.

"Perhaps even your maid-servant will have been taken."

"No, *sahib*, they would not take her; her home is here."

By her side he traveled to where the now deserted tents of the decoits stood silent and dark, like little pagodas of sullen crime. A light flickered in one tent, and silhouetted against its canvas they could see the form of a woman crouched with her head in her hands.

"The maid is there," Barlow said, "but it is not enough. I will bring my blankets and sleep here at the door of your tent."

"No, *sahib*, it is not needed," the girl protested.

"Yes, Bootea, I will come." Then, with a little laugh, he added, "The gods have ordained that we take turns at protecting each other. It is now my turn; I will come soon."

She turned her small oval face up to look at this wonderful man, to discover if he were really there, that it was not some kindly god who would vanish. He clasped the face, with its soul of adoration, in his two palms, and kissed her. Then, fearing that she would fall, for she had closed her eyes and reeled, he took her by the arm, opened the flap of the tent, and steadied her into the arms of her handmaid.

It was a fitful night's sleep for Barlow. The beat of horses' hoofs on the streets or the white sands beyond was like the patter of rain on a roof. There were hoarse, bull-throated cries of men who rode hither and thither; tremulous voices floated on the night air wild dirges, like the weird Afghan love song. Sometimes a long smooth-bore barked its sharp call. At sunrise the captain was roused from this tiring sleep by the strident, weird, sing-song of the *mullah* sending forth from a minaret of the palace his call to the faithful to prayer—prayer for the dead chief. And when the voice had ceased its *muezzin*:

"Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar;
Confess that there is no God but God;
Confess that Mahomet is the prophet of God;
Come to prayer, come to prayer,
For prayer is better than sleep."

the big drums sent forth a thundering reverberation.

He could hear the voices of the two women within, and called, "Bootea! Bootea!"

The Gulab came shyly from the tent, saying, "Salaam, *sahib*." Then she stood with her eyes drooped, waiting for him to speak.

"It is this, Bootea," Barlow said. "Do not go away until I am ready to depart, then I will take you wherever you wish to go."

"If it is permitted, *sahib*, I will wait," she answered as simply as a child.

Barlow put a finger under her chin, and lifting her face, smiled like a great boy, saying, "Gulab, you are wonderfully sweet."

Then Barlow went to the *serai*, looked after his horse, had his breakfast, and passed back into the town. He saw a continuous stream of men moving toward the

small river that swept southward, to the east of the town, and asking of one the cause he was told that the murderer—for now Hunsa was known as the *ahiria*—murderer—was being sent on his way. The speaker was a Rajput. "It is strange, Afghan, that one who has slain the chief of these wild barbarians, who are without gods, should be allowed to depart in peace. We Rajputs worship a god that visits the sin upon the head of the sinner, but the order has been passed that no man shall harm the slayer of Amir Khan. Perhaps it is whispered in the bazaar that Commander Kassim coveted the chiefship."

Barlow, being in the guise of a Mussel man, said solemnly: "Allah will punish the murderer, mark you well, man of Rajastan."

"As to that, Afghan, one stroke of a *tulwar* would put the matter beyond doubt; as it is, let us push forward, because I see from yonder steady array of spears that the Pindaris ride toward the river, and I think the prisoner is with them. It was one Hunsa, a thug, and though the thugs worship Bhowanee, they are worse than the *mhangs* who are of no caste at all."

As Barlow came to where the town reached to the river bank he saw that the concourse of people was heading south along the river. This was rather strange, for a bridge of stone arches traversed by the aid of two islands the Nahal to the other side. A quarter of a mile lower down he came to where the river, that above wandered in three channels over a rocky bed, now glided sluggishly in one channel. It was like a ribboned lake, smooth in its slow slip over a muddy bed, and circling in a long sweep to the bank. On the level plain was a concourse of thousands—horsemen, who sat their lean-flanked Marwari or Cabul horses, as though they waited to swing into a parade, the march past. The *sowars* he had seen in the town were in front of Barlow, riding four abreast, and at a command from their leader, opened up and formed a scimitar-shaped band, their horses' noses toward the river. As he came close Barlow saw Kassim in a group of officers, and Hunsa, a soldier on either side of him, was standing free and unshackled in

front of the commander. Save for the clanking of a bit, or the clang of a spearhaft against a stirrup, or the scuffle of a quick-turning horse's hoofs, a silence rested upon that vast throng. Wild, barbaric faces held a look of expectancy, of wonderment, for no one knew why the order had been passed that they were to assemble at that point.

Kassim caught sight of Barlow as he drew near, and raising his hand in a salute, said: "Come close, *sahib*. The slayer of Amir Khan, in accordance with my promise, is to go from our midst a free man. His punishment has been left to Allah, the one God."

Without more ado he stretched forth his right arm impressively toward the murky stream, where it rippled at some disturbance carried on its bosom ribbons of gold where the sun fell, saying:

"Yonder lies the way, infidel, strangler, slayer of a follower of the Prophet! Depart, for failing that, it lacks but an hour

till the sun reaches overheat, and thy time will have elasped—thou will die by the torture. You are free, even as I attested by the beard of the Prophet. And more, what is not in the covenant"—Kassim drew from beneath his rich, brocaded vest a dagger, its blade still carrying the dried blood of the chief—"this is thine to keep thy vile life if you can. Seest thou if the weapon is still wedded to thy hand. It is that thou goest hand in hand with thy crime."

He handed the knife to a soldier with a word of command, and the man thrust it in the belt of Hunsa.

Even as Kassim ceased speaking two round bubbles floated upon the smooth waters of the sullen river, and above them was a green slime; then a square shovel just topped the water, and Barlow could hear, issuing from the thing of horror, a breath like a sigh. He shuddered. It was a square-nosed *mugger*—crocodile—waiting. And beyond, the water here and there swirled, as if a powerful tail swept it.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



IN AN OLD HOME

THE thoughts of other days they keep;
They will not brook a newer thing.
From smoke-stained rafters, where they sleep,
The boneset and lobelia swing;

The old-time carpet on the floor,
The hair-cloth sofa, straight and grim;
While from those falls watch evermore
Ancestral portraits, quaint and dim.

And yet their rooms a lurking power
Of sleep to wakeful eyelids bear,
As if some dream-filled poppy-flower
Had died, and left its essence there.

A strange allurement, where my heart
Feels all earth's hopes and pleasures cease;
Yet finds, from modern ways apart,
A refuge, and a sense of peace.



Broadway Stuff

By **GEORGE B. JENKINS, JR.**

"I'VE got a story for you," Eddie announced importantly as he dropped into a chair beside me in the Automat. I had dropped into this nickel-nursers' Delmonico for a cup of Java and a little rest.

"Spill the story, Eddie," I suggested amiably. Every one who knows I once entered a newspaper's booklovers' contest thinks I am an author. Eddie, who ill-treats a wicked snare drum in the orchestra of the Palatial Theater, has often told me that he would write some of the things he's seen if he could ever find the time.

Thirty minutes later I came out of a doze. Eddie was evidently on the final lap of the story. After the first hundred words I knew we were both wasting our time, but I didn't have the courage to smear the glow of happiness in his eyes. He thought the yarn he was telling was a million dollars in Liberty bonds, but to my mind it wasn't worth keeping awake to hear.

"And that busted up the romance. Alicia took the baby and went weeping back

to father. Gordon said, 'You may be my mother, but I think you're a meddling old hag. If you'd kept your mouth shut, I wouldn't have shot him.' Then he leaped for New York, shipped on a tramp as a common sailor, and never came back. How could he, after what had happened?

"Well, the old dame sold all the furniture in the apartment," Eddie concluded, "went down to Atlantic City and vamped an ancient gent on the boardwalk. He had a soft spot in the bean, and he married her before the courts could say he was insane. Now the old dame is worth millions. What d'you think of that?"

"Rotten," I replied mournfully. "The thing is absurd and unbelievable. Why, you've made a woman deliberately ruin her son's life! And then marry money afterward! It may be true, Eddie, and everything, but I wouldn't send that to a magazine on a bet. The dear public likes to think of mothers as nice, sweet, white-haired old ladies; they don't want to admit

that mothers are just as selfish as men are."

"Some of them are worse!" Eddie declared heatedly. "Why, I could tell you—"

"Don't," I interrupted. "I'm going to go home and write the story about the poor girl who marries the young millionaire. That yarn has been printed seven times a month for the last five years. It's what the public wants, and I'm going to give it to them."

Eddie groaned, and sipped his coffee silently. His eyes traveled over the queer crowd that inhabits the Automat. Song writers who have never sold a song, moving picture actors who have never been filmed, weird-looking people who were born and raised in New York City, smart, well-dressed people from the Middle West, a chorine or two, stage hands from near-by theaters, soda fountain clerks and their sweeties just from the opera, college professors newly produced from a moving picture show.

"You gimme acute indigestion with that chatter," he said at last. "I read a magazine once, and it wasn't half as interesting as the joshing in the cigar store. Why don't you write some of the things that have happened to me? They'd make a good story; better than the ones they print in magazines."

I had heard this sort of remark before, and I knew what he meant. Unfortunately the sort of things that had happened to him were more suitable for publication in the *Smoking Room Gazette* than in a magazine that was supposed to travel through the mails.

"There's stuff happening on Broadway every day," he persisted, "that makes the magazine stories pale and sickly. Now, take the case of—"

"Wait a minute! Is this sweet and pretty? No devilish mothers in it? No cold-blooded murders? No—"

"Pin your ears back and listen," Eddie interrupted. "Here's men and women. They eat, sleep, fight. They fall in love. What's a murder or two?"

"I'll cut the murders out," I murmured, but Eddie was off.

"She was Spanish, she said, but I always thought that square-jawed kind came from somewhere in Hungary, or one of those hick nations that have got names you can't pronounce. But Lolita de Soto was different from the usual run of hunkies.

"For one thing, she had small feet and ankles, and a tiny mouth. But it wasn't anything about her looks that got her over, though the photographs in the *Clipper* made her look different—and interesting—in a queer way. No; Lolita got by on clothes, and—the thing that one woman in ten thousand gets from the devil.

"It makes a man stare, and then start in her direction. I've seen her drift out of her hotel and just pass across the sidewalk, and men walking along in a hurry would skid to a stop. Lolita had it—she was like that girl you saw in the subway train last week; the girl you saw for a bit of a second, and that you'll remember for the rest of your life.

"Clothes? She had 'em by the dozen! Anything she put on looked a thousand times better than it would look on any other woman in the world. That's what Broadway thought, particularly Chet Van Wert. And she drew down what she could, which was much, and she played around as much as she liked, which was much, and the Van Werts got worried.

"For Chet backed Lolita in a couple of flivver shows; that is, the shows flivvered, but they were in the Rolls-Royce class when it came to cost and upkeep. You know the sort of chatter that flits about Broadway about the angel of a show; well, I'm not saying a thing, because I'm busy concealing my own crimes."

"Eddie, when does something happen in this story?" I asked sadly. "Are you going to drift into autobiography?"

"Not to you," he said, grinning; "whatever that is. I'm busy telling you about Lolita, Chet, and the bulldog-faced boy from Montana.

"Montana was first seen in Row A, Seat 102, on the first night of the third show Chet had purchased for Lolita. Everybody in the cast got into the gravy, to say nothing of the lad who staged it, the scene painters, the costumers, the ushers, and the or-

chestra. I played the drums, and I got round-shouldered from carrying my weekly jack home. Why don't they grow free spenders like that now?"

"They grow," I assured him. "I sold a story last week."

"The editor ought to be fired," Eddie commented. "Anyway, Montana occupied the same seat during the first week the show ran, and sent invitations around for every one in the company to come out to his country place for the week-end; Saturday night to Monday afternoon. Those that went raved all during Monday night's performance. Of course Lolita didn't go. Too proud! Boy, they talked about the sunken garden, and the reception hall, and the guest chambers as though they'd never lived in a sixth-floor back walk-up.

"I should whisper about Lolita?" Eddie inquired, and then answered his own question: "Not in a million years! I do know that Dan Reilly, the usher, took a note to Montana on Tuesday evening. The human bulldog was in the same seat; he had no difficulty in getting it. Outside of the cut-price theatergoers, relatives of the chorus girls, and the ushers, the theater was empty.

"On the following day I heard further details. Lolita came in, and that Wednesday evening performance was a scorcher. On the stage she was sweet and lovely; back stage she raised hell. She battled with the he-lead, she slapped a chorus girl, she sassed the stage manager, and she insulted everybody in the cast.

"Chet Van Wert came around with his usual armful of flowers. She was icily polite to him, and he started to talk to Maida Warren, a chorus lady. Lolita saw them, and—volcano erupted.

"That girl spoils the entire show, I think," Lolita began, calmly. Then she stared at Maida ten, twenty, thirty seconds. "Get her out of here!"

"There was more to it, but we won't repeat the unpleasant part.

"I've invited her to go to dinner with us to-night," says Chet, after Lolita had stopped for breath. "My friend Bob Adams, from Montana, wants to meet her."

Now Lolita had tried to meet Montana, but he had ignored her note. Since she had

not been telephoned by the gent, Lolita felt humiliated. Her annoyance wasn't bothered much by the news that Maida was the chick that Montana was coming to the show to see.

"But Lolita thought fast. Adams from Montana had turned her down, and that made her like him. Women, you know, like to be snubbed by a man. I remember—"

"Just a moment, Eddie. All the women I've snubbed," I said, "have instantly snubbed me. Don't generalize about women."

"Leave it lay. Let's get on. Women don't follow rules, anyhow."

"So Lolita thought that she'd switch. Immediately after ordering Chet to discharge Maida, Lolita rushed over and they embraced.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're going to dinner with us, dear!" That's what Lolita chortled. And maybe she got by with it; I dunno.

"Far be it from me to pass a remark about a lady. I know what Lolita was after, and so do you. Chet Van Wert was a good guy; a little loose with his money; bugs about Lolita. But Lolita had heard whispers that the family was going to give Chet the razz, and she was looking for another gent with gelt. From the booze, favors, autos, and *et cetera*, at Montana's country home, he must own a mint. So it looked to Lolita, and I thought the same.

"After the theater I whanged a sneering triangle in one of those all-night supper clubs. Naturally, since it was the newest and most expensive in New York, the party of four went there. Lolita looked like what she was; Maida looked like what she was. There was some contrast at that table.

"Chet Van Wert, young, clean-cut, nicked a little by the bright lights; Adams from Montana, heavy, thick-set, bulldog face, prosperous; Lolita, jewels and more jewels, a dress that shrieked, complexion—too much, perfumed, *blasé* and superior; Maida, trim, smart, very faint complexion, wearing a coat suit and a little frill of white at her throat and wrists.

"I leave it to you to say who made a hit. Before, Lolita had used her head; she

had monopolized Chet, or taken care that he met her sort of women. Now, for the first time, young Van Wert saw Lolita and the other sort together.

"Montana had the same idea. From the orchestra stand, where I whanged the triangle and other utensils of my profession, I could see that party of four. And Lolita, with all her pep, personality, and passionate clothes, was merely a good second. Not an easy first, but a good second."

"But we never want what we can get. Montana gave his entire attention to Maida, but that penniless little chorine gave him—nothing! She shed sweet smiles at Chet Van Wert, and he looked more than mildly interested, but not much more. He was still somewhat under Lolita's charm. And, considering the length of time she had held him hog-tied, and the stunts she'd pulled in the meanwhile, he would be backing her in more shows.

"Lolita, of course, was after new game, new wealthy game. Adams of the bulldog face was being tracked down. Nobody else in that restaurant saw what was going on. They just looked like a party of four, mixed like most parties of four are, having supper together.

"I would have missed the rest of this except for Alexandre, the head waiter there. 'Mr. Adams, at that table,' he says to me, leaving off the French accent because I knew him when he was Alex, son of the town druggist, 'wants a case taken up to his apartment. Want to make ten on the side, Eddie?'

"I nodded, glad of the chance. It meant chaperoning a case of regular stuff in a taxi somewhere, me taking all chances of getting pinched and so on. That's where those rich guys have it all over the poor—"

"Omit the sociology, Eddie," I entreated. "I can hear that sort of a speil on the street corner any night."

"Well, I said all right. About three or four, or some time, when the place began to get rough, Lolita and her gang blew. They all seemed to be O. K., though not pleased. Isn't it funny how booze makes you feel worse if you feel bad, and better if you feel good?"

"I grabbed one end of a case of Haig

and Haig, imported from Canada by night, and bought a taxi. The chauffeur of my machine tried to drive me up a dark street so he could hold me up, and I had to shove a gat in his spine before he'd slow down from sixty an hour. But I got to the apartment at last, and just in time to have seven chills at once.

"'Where'll you have the sudden death?' says I, pleasantly, dragging in the case.

"Chet was glued and mussy. He wanted to fight somebody. It was a peach of an apartment, and there was but one peach in the room. That was Maida, and it looked odd that she'd stuck with that crowd so long.

"In about ten minutes Chet would be wrestling with the furniture, if he couldn't get a scrap from any one. Lolita, looking like she's look in ten years, was standing next to Montana. He was giving her a sour glare. There was a mean curl to Adams's mouth that I didn't like.

"Nobody answered; so I tried again. 'Where's the cellar in this place? Or shall I leave it here?'

"'I was promised ten,' says I, 'and taxi fare. That makes it twelve fifty.'

"'Borrow your gun, Adams,' said Chet, picking up a black automatic from the table. 'Think I'll make this bootlegger sing a song.' Then he turns to me: 'Sing "Sweet Adeline,"' says he, weaving over closer.

"I stood there like a dumb fool. 'I can't turn a tune,' says I. 'Sorry. Twelve fifty, gents, and I'll wander.'

"'Liar!' said Chet, and slaps me with his open hand. 'Sing.' And he lifts his hand again.

"I don't mind telling you that made me mad. Before I had decided that Chet should have one on the point of the jaw—job or no job—Maida butted in. She caught Chet's hand and turned him around.

"'Don't be silly,' says she. 'Let the man—'

"That was when Chet was silly. I heard a funny kind of gasp from him. He was pointing like a hunting dog. There across the room from him, in a regular moving picture clutch, was Lolita and Adams from Montana.

"I don't know what most people would

do, but I know what Chet did. He had a gun in his hand, and he had some sort of right to Lolita. That woman would knock your eye out, and Chet had shed a lot of the family fortune, battled with his family, and generally raised shrieking hell on her account. Well, it looked like she was planning to toss him.

"What—Lolita!" he says, in a sort of a scared whisper.

"I've told you that she wasn't particular in her language. 'Take that little chick and get out,' says she, only she didn't call Maida a chick. 'I'm through with you,' says she.

"That automatic did make a lot of noise. I just stood there, with my mouth open, and listened to it spit. One, two, three! Chet gave him the trio while Montana came toward him.

"I've got to give that Western guy credit. He'd stagger, but he kept on coming. When he reached the table he seemed to crumple up and fall sidewise. He turned over a couple of inkwells, and his hand went to his heart.

"After a while I closed my mouth. I had to. I felt the round muzzle of Chet's revolver sticking in my side. But Chet didn't have the gun. It was Maida.

"Don't make a sound," says she. "Keep your mouth shut, and lead the way to the taxi. I'm going to get Chet out of this."

"You can bet I stepped softly. I took one glance at Lolita, and saw her staring at the gentleman on the table. By now Chet was a white ghost; all the booze was out of him. He clung to Maida's hand like a frightened kid.

"Go upstairs," says Maida when we reached the hall, "and push the button for the elevator." We all climbed up one flight, just as doors began to open. We were standing there, me jamming the button when an old guy, wearing a nightshirt—I didn't know anybody wore one of them now—poked his head out of the door.

"What's the matter? Burglars?" says he.

"I couldn't say a word, but Maida was calm enough.

"That's a taxi back firing," says she. "He's been having trouble with his car."

"Well, it was lucky we were upstairs.

Lolita, on the floor below, let loose the loudest collection of shrieks I've ever heard. Of course we three didn't know anything about it. When the elevator finally came up to our floor there was a crowd around her, listening to her scream. And so we got Chet to the Grand Central Station without any trouble at all."

Eddie sighed and looked reflectively at his empty coffee cup. "There's a good story for you," he said. "Why don't you write that and sell it to a magazine?"

"Oh, for about a dozen reasons," I replied. "I've listened to you, but—Look at what you've given me! A man kills another man and escapes. That's no good. I'm going to write the story of the poor girl who marries the rich young man. Every magazine prints that story ever so often. I need nourishment, Eddie."

He smiled in a superior and extremely irritating manner. "You've got me wrong," he declared. "That's the way with you bum writers; you listen, but you don't hear." He shook his head sadly. "He eats, he sleeps, he talks. He looks like a human being, but—that's all. Your head should be used as the corner stone of a mausoleum."

"You can say what you like," I retorted, a trifle brusquely. "I never argue with a man twenty pounds heavier and ten years younger. But the story you told me is hopeless! If you don't write the story of the poor girl who marries a rich young man, you've got to write the story with a twist on the end. Now, you haven't given me either."

Eddie gazed mournfully at the ceiling of the Automat. I looked upward also and saw it for the first time. At last he spoke.

"At times," he remarked reflectively, "I believe you have the mental development of a moving picture actor, but at other times I am doubtful. Take the story I have just told you, for instance. There's about a dozen words more to it."

"When the gang in the apartment house came into Montana's place, they expected to see his dead body lying on the table. But it wasn't there. And it wasn't on the floor under the table. And it wasn't in the room, either."

BROADWAY STUFF.

"So some of them says: 'Home-made hooch,' and the rest of them says: 'My God! Ghosts!' and the gang blows, leaving Lolita to pick up her wraps and go home alone. She made a quick exit.

"I rode in the taxi to the Grand Central Station, while Chet tells Maida how grateful he is for her saving him from the consequences of his awful crime. They get out, and I buy two tickets for California, and comes back to the apartment. Montana has just finished washing his hands, and was climbing into a clean shirt.

"'Well,' says he, 'did it work?'

"'Perfect,' says I, and we shake hands.

"And the next day Mrs. Van Wert, Chet's mother, pays us off. I've got that gat in my room now; I'll show it to you some time."

"You were paid off!" I exclaimed.
"Was this whole thing a frame-up?"

"Sure," Eddie replied in a long-suffering voice. "I'll explain it to you four times, and maybe you'll understand it next week. Mrs. Van wanted to get Chet away from Lolita. She borrowed the country

estate and the apartment from a friend that Montana could make a splash. Adams from Montana is a friend of mine who works daytimes, sometimes, on the police force. He's supposed to be a detective. The gun was not loaded; it was filled with blanks. Adams dabbled his fingers in red ink, and made red marks on his shirt. Maida was in on the scheme, though neither Chet or Lolita knew it." Eddie sighed deeply and began again: "Mrs. Van wanted to get Chet—" He patiently repeated the same words over and over again.

"I get it!" I howled at last. "I understand! Don't tell me that again!"

Eddie lighted a cigarette and we rose, for smoking is not permitted in the Automat. "And if you must write the story of the poor girl who marries a rich guy—"

"I know!" I interrupted. "You bought two tickets for California. Maida was a poor little chorus girl, but Chet married her and they lived—"

"Sure," said Eddie. "Isn't that a peach of a story?"

What do you think?



TENANTED

MY heart was an empty castle,
Wide open swung the doors,
And the cold wind blew,
And the rain beat through
And trickled on the floors.

The sacred room was vacant,
But a cherub came to see—
A smiling thing,
With downy wing—
And lo, I turned the key!

And now the hall is lighted
From basement to above,
And the door's barred tight
Both day and night,
To keep it warm for love.

Margaret Severance.



The Bird of Passage

By JOHN SCHOOLCRAFT

Author of "Let the Wedding Wait," etc.

CHAPTER XXI (*continued*).

HIGH FINANCE.

SPRINGTIME! It's wonderful—it's marvelous! I knew it—I knew you could do anything in the world you put your mind to!"

The inventor shook his head.

"It's all right—but it takes two people to run it, and I'm not two people. And that father of yours is due for one big panning from somebody! I tried to get a loan from him to hire somebody and he kidded me on and on until I spilled myself all over the place and then told me to get to hell out of there! Oh, my good gosh! If only he worked for me sometime!"

He walked gloomily to the machine, and with one strong wrench, tore the hopper off.

Kitty clasped him with both of her arms and almost screamed.

"Springtime! You mustn't! It's wonderful!"

"What's the use? I can't turn with one hand and pick with the other, can I? And I haven't the coin to hire any one."

Kitty looked at him—and then laughed.

"Silly old Springtime! Just as though I wouldn't turn the crank or blow up a bank or do anything to help you. There isn't anything about this crank turning that I couldn't master, is there?"

Springtime shook his head.

"Couldn't be done."

"Why not?"

"Well, it couldn't, that's all."

"You could hire me to do it," said Kitty, "and pay me when you got the money."

stead he slapped his thigh and guffawed in his best stable manner:

"Do you know what you remind me of? These guys that play tunes on a table full of bells. You know—" and he gave an exceedingly broad imitation of the vaudeville performer, who with bells of all tongues and sizes spread out before him, plays "Poet and Peasant."

Springtime did not stop; he smiled, for Osborne had the gift of caricature, but went on with his bell ringing. Then the old man took out his watch and looked at it, shook it, and held it to his ear.

"Son, you must be sick," he said; "it's eight minutes past twelve. Didn't you hear the whistles blow?"

Apparently Osborne was ignoring Kitty rather pointedly. She stopped turning the crank and stretched herself cautiously, rubbed her elbows and forearms and shook herself. Her father, without any reference to her as his daughter, said: "Always keep your help comfortable. Never coddle them. This girl ought to have a chair to sit in."

Springtime looked his contrition, and Kitty walked past her father without a glance. The old man knew just how far he could go with Kitty and there was a spark in her eye that told him this was one of the times when he ought to keep still. Springtime was rather elaborate in the way he settled the beans down on the half-full sack and in the way he pushed the full one back so that the door could swing farther than it had ever swung before, but if he hoped to draw some favorable comment from the old man it did not work.

At noon he carried a chair down and made a hay cushion for Kitty out of a grain sack. When she was comfortable, there was nothing to stop him for the rest of the afternoon, and he set out to make a record. All afternoon while the sun spots crawled across the floor and up the walls Kitty clung to the handle, stopping only when Springtime carried away a full sack, or to fill the hopper, which he did as though he were carrying buckets of water to a fire. The bouncing of the black beans, and the purring song of the good ones spurred him on as a chanty spurs on a sailor.

Neither spoke, except that at periodic

intervals Springtime asked if she were tired, and Kitty said: "No, no! Don't stop!" All afternoon his fingers flew like those of an expert needle woman, and when a big bag was full he tied it and juggled it out of sheer happiness.

When the plow works whistle blew and Kitty slumped down in the chair, six bushels were finished altogether; one by hand in four days and five by machine in one day. Springtime reckoned that what with the stops he had had to make this was not a sample, working day and that with uninterrupted time he could finish within three more days. Free to follow the trials of his fancy—free except for one thing, the loyal Kitty who had stuck by the handle as a mother sticks to a crib. In spite of his success he felt that he was not the man to make her happy, and as the uncultured beans diminished so the wandering half of him began to shout for its rights.

"I wish," said Kitty as she got out of the chair, "that you could top dad in getting a good price for these beans. He always gets the top of the market, and he's as proud of it as a man could be of anything. If you could get a cent or two above him he would respect you more than he does any one."

"Those are great beans," said Springtime. "There isn't a one there that's a half shade off color."

"I know all about this price business," said Kitty. "I've shopped around for women's things and I've seen the same thing—mufflers for instance—in two different stores, with about a third difference in the prices. One place would have a little card over the muffler, saying 'Hand-loomed' or something like that and that was what the extra dollar or so was for. Do you know what hand-loomed means?"

Springtime shook his head.

"Neither do I. Nobody does, but people fall for it, and the store that puts the card on the muffler and sells it for a third more sells ten times as many as the other store. I wonder what you could call these? You couldn't call beans hand-loomed, could you?"

"Hand-picked," suggested Springtime.

"But they aren't—they're machine-

picked, although you do most of the work with your hands, don't you? Hand-picked is overworked, anyway—we ought to think of something better than that."

Springtime leaned his head on his hands and thought, but could get nothing better than "milled."

"Not so good, not so good," said Kitty, still turning the crank absent-mindedly. "I have it! Extra fancy—remilled!"

"Gee!" said Springtime in awe. "That's wonderful! Extra fancy remilled Michigan beans. That ought to be worth five cents more a bushel."

"You go and try it now!" said Kitty. "There's just one place in town that would give you five cents a bushel over the market for remilled beans and that's Pasquale's grocery. He has everything queer like alligator pears and anchovies and funny salad oils, and everything he has is the very best there is and a lot more expensive than anybody's. He's open now—will be until a quarter to six. I know, because I've had to run down there to get cream lots of times. But first go to the elevator—they'll tell you there how much the regular price is, and don't you let these go for a cent less than five cents a bushel above that price."

Springtime looked at Tom Osborne's daughter with still greater awe. She was her father's daughter with her father's practical sense, but as she stood there, fawn-like in figure, with the luminous eyes showing their ruddy depths in the sunlight, she looked more like a creature out of a fairy tale.

"You're all right!" was all that he could think of to say, although that half of him which she owned body and soul wanted to say more.

He filled a small sack with his product, walked down to the elevator and found that the latest market quotation was two dollars and ninety-five cents a bushel. Then he went on until he stood before the aristocratic plate-glass front of Pasquale's store. It was not a grocery store, for the name grocery store smacked of old days when the open sugar barrel stood uncovered by a front door that had no screen in the summertime; Pasquale, a neat, plump, good-natured Italian, was a provision merchant,

He took Springtime's sack and poured some of the contents into his palm. He recognized them at once.

"Mr. Osborne's beans," he said.

"Yes. Remilled."

The thick eyebrows shot up.

"Remilled?"

"Sure—a new process which he is just trying out. That's a good sample; if anything, the rest of the beans are better than that. Absolutely no dark ones—every bean is hard, plump, and as white as a china egg. The remilling takes care of that."

"Sure! Sure!" said the provision merchant with a twinkle in his liquid eye. "I give you two ninety-five a bushel."

"Couldn't possibly sell for less than three five," said Springtime as he tied up the neck of his sample bag and slipped it into his pocket. "Two ninety-five wouldn't pay for the remilling. We're planning to send them to the big Chicago hotels."

They compromised on three dollars a bushel—five cents above the elevator price, and Springtime trundled his bushel down on a wheelbarrow, and when he got there the store was closed, not to him, but to customers. Pasquale was working on his windows, which he changed every day. One was full of a pyramid of fruits of all kinds with small bottles of rainbow-colored cordials tucked into the crevices; the other was empty except for a big sheet of white paper which covered the entire bottom of the window. After he had been paid Springtime lingered long enough to see his beans put into a clean, new basket, which Pasquale tipped slowly so that they spilled out in an even flow, like lava running from a volcano. He propped the basket there and then put a small sign in the middle of the lava flow—a card jagged at the ends to look like a rustic sign post. The card read: "Early Osbornes. Remilled—the better bean."

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAUGHT.

THIS Osborne household lived under a double strain after Kitty had given Johnny's story to the newspaper man—first there was the strain of expecting

news, and second the great effort to keep the wary Johnny from knowing that anything was in the wind.

The net drew closer about him. It was less than a week after the newspaper writer had set his typewriter chattering over the story of the checker-playing marvel when Mrs. Osborne fluttered into the tin shed with a slip of newspaper flimsy and a telegram. The girl ceased her everlasting turning of the crank and cried out with joy when she read the telegram and the message from her friend of the pen.

"Publicity brings results," said the note, and the telegram read:

Mrs. K. Martin, 10 Harrison Street, this city, thinks checker-playing boy her runaway son, John. Please advise how to get boy here. R. Dean, Editor Wellsville (Ohio) *Courant*.

"Wellsville!" cried Kitty, turning the slip over and over in her hand. "Why, that isn't sixty miles from here on the State road. Dad and I have driven it dozens of times."

"Wellsville," said Springtime; "I know that burg. There's a good hangout there and the bulls are all easy. Sure, it isn't over sixty miles from here. The slick little devil! I wonder if he knows how close to home he is?"

Mrs. Osborne charged toward the door, but Kitty intercepted her. She did not trust her mother's judgment in times like these.

"I'm going to find Johnny!" cried the mother. "He ought to know, most certainly."

"Oh, good gosh, no!" said Springtime, and Kitty seized her mother by the arm and hung tight.

"He'd be gone like a shot, mom! Don't, please don't! You'll ruin everything even if you look as though there were anything out of the way! You have no idea what a wild lad that is!"

"That boy," said Mrs. Osborne with dignity, "would want his mother again. That I know, even if he is abnormal. The reason why he *seems* not to want to go home is because he doesn't remember his home. That is perfectly clear to me, although it seems to escape the rest of you. However, I decline any responsibility in

the matter, and you may count on my silence. Go ahead as you see fit."

When she had gone out of the shed Springtime and Kitty looked at each other. Those long silent hours there when Kitty was turning the crank and Springtime was playing bell ringer had built up a *camaraderie*, so that she understood his unspoken thought.

"Gee, we'll have to be wary!" said Kitty. "We'll have to be as cautious as anything. We'll take him home. You and I in the flivver. I can drive it and you can hang onto him—maybe he'll fight when he see where he's going."

"I'm wondering if it's the right place," said Springtime. "It sure would be a peach if we dragged him off to a mother he didn't belong to. I have an idea that a mother with a lost kid would be so anxious to believe that he was alive that any old picture of a healthy lad would look like her own. I'd better telegraph and find out. I know a fence there who's wise to everything in that town. How about it?"

"Right, as always," said Kitty. "What's a fence?"

"Never mind. You'll never see one—leastways the kind of fence I mean."

"Be careful," cautioned Kitty, "and I'll slip it to dad when he comes home."

On the way to the telegraph office Springtime met Johnny—Johnny with traces of blood on his upper lip and a rent in his knickerbocker suit. He stopped when he saw Springtime coming and waited for him.

"Gee, I've been playing football," he said, "and you ought to have seen me get away with that ball! I sure showed these hick kids what playing is."

"Go on!" said Springtime incautiously. "That town you come from is about half the size of this one. I laugh at you when you call this a hick place. Did you ever hear the old proverb about people that lived in glass houses not throwing stones?"

"Yeah?" said Johnny as he cocked an eye at his pal. "Where you heading?"

"Down the street."

"I'll go with you."

"You will not. I'm busy."

"Oh, sleuth stuff!" mocked Johnny. "Or are you buying the girl a ring? Can't

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THE BIRD OF PASSAGE.

spill it, can you? All right, don't I don't give a damn.

He started up the street, and Springtime waited until he was well out of sight before he dodged into the telegraph office and sent a message to his friend, the fence.

Find out if there is iron dog in the yard of Mrs. K. Martin, 10 Harrison Street. Wire T. Osborne, collect.

He signed his moniker of Springtime, for the good reason that no man on the road knew him by any other name. When he was back in the house one shrewd twinkle from Osborne's eye told him that the old man knew what was in the wind.

When the door bell rang the head of the house got up with a grumbled, "That's for me. I'm expecting a telegram." He came back into the dining room and finished his supper in a silence which Springtime and Kitty tried hard to keep from being suspiciously electric. When Osborne had finished he lighted a cigar and strolled out into the darkness of the lawn, and after a moment Springtime followed.

"The iron dog's there," said the old man. "I'll miss the little devil. Don't know but what I'll keep track of him and see that he gets an education. He's bright—what he needs is ballast. You and Kitty take him home—he might suspect me because I've been threatening him with so many things that he won't ride with me any more. You get out the old flivver in the morning the minute he shows up out doors and throw a sack of beans in the back. Then tell him you're carrying them to some place for me, and ask him if he wants to ride. He'll fall—maybe; but gosh, if he doesn't put up a fight when he sees his own burg coming over the horizon, I'll eat my hat. He's sure a home-keeping spirit—I don't think! Watch your step or there'll be one kid missing at dawn."

They were all cautious, but even so, Johnny caught a warning from somewhere, and after he and Springtime had got into bed the lad lay with his head off the pillow and his bright eyes fixed on the wanderer.

"Springtime," he asked, "what's all this hush stuff?"

By gosh," said Springtime, "trust you

to smell it out. Sure you've got a good nose for news. Osborne's pulling some political dope, and it's absolutely necessary that nobody know anything about it. I told him he needn't be afraid of you, but he said you played around some with the son of the guy he wants to keep in the dark."

Johnny chuckled.

"I knew there was something up," he said, dropped his head to the pillow and was asleep in two winks.

Kitty and Springtime skulked around the barn door until they saw Johnny come out on the lawn. Then Springtime slammed the doors back and Kitty backed the little machine out with the exhaust wide open. Johnny drifted over toward the drive and stood watching while Springtime heaved a sack of beans into the tonneau and then put his foot on the running board. Kitty, with the true touch of the artist, started, and then stopped, and leaning out, said: "Oh, Johnny, do you want to come along?"

"Where you going?"

"Out in the country. Long drive."

"Sure!" said Johnny, and vaulted the fence and jumped into the rear seat with the beans.

"Come around in front," suggested Springtime, "there's room for three, and we'll keep each other warm. It's a nippy morning."

Johnny clambered over and took a place between Springtime and Kitty. As they rolled out of the alley they saw Osborne standing on a corner, and the hand that he raised gave a signal of congratulation. Kitty sailed past him for the reason that she felt their greatest safety was in keeping up such a speed that the boy would not dare to leap out. It was a cold fall morning, so early that there was very little traffic on the road. The rush of wind whipped the color into Kitty's cheeks and fanned Johnny's high spirits to a point where he was almost a public nuisance. He hailed every foot passenger with, "Hey, bindle stiff!" and he had a greeting for every horse and cow that hung its head out of the frosted pastures.

The white road rolled under them at a

good twenty-five an hour. Springtime sat with his hand along the back of the seat where he could grasp the lad's collar at the slightest movement. He did not dare to look at Kitty often, nor did Kitty dare to look at him, but when a sign post flashed by which said, "Six miles to Wellsville," Springtime stole a look at Kitty and saw that she had not missed it. Her answer was an increase in speed.

Johnny kept up his chatter, then in the midst of it stopped as dead as if he had been suddenly struck dumb. Springtime laid his hand as if by accident on the boy's arm, and looking at Kitty, saw that she was pale from excitement. Johnny turned back and stared at a clump of tall butternut trees which stood in the middle of a field—three trees placed in a triangle. He said nothing, but turned his head to stare at a big brick institution on a hill. Then a black water tower swam up over the horizon.

"Springtime, you snitcher!" yelled Johnny, and became a hundred pounds of living fury. He was across Springtime in a flash and had the door open almost before the man could get his arms around him and drag him back. Springtime forced him back into the seat, and Kitty, white-faced, kept the car up to the top of its speed. He struggled like a wild cat, swearing at the top of his voice.

"Springtime, you——" he cried; "you low down dick! You—— I'll get even with you if it takes me all my life. Of all the low down tricks I ever heard of. Oh, gee, you're a fine guy, you are! You're a prince! If old Bender knew about this."

"I'm doing just what old Bender wanted done," said Springtime grimly. "And take it easy, son! We've got you cold this time and you might as well kick in."

Johnny kept up his struggling until he was exhausted, then slumped down into the seat and looked straight ahead of him. The car rattled over a bridge with a pool under it, and Johnny sat up to look at it, for that was the swimming hole. A quarter of a mile farther on a few scattered houses swam to meet them, and then a circular high board fence. At sight of it Johnny broke into bitter speech again.

"I suppose the old man put you up to

this! He's one wise old bird, he is! What a hick! Oh, boy! Ha, ha!" But his laughter was a bit forced. To tell the truth, the net was closing so completely around Johnny that he was almost ready to give up.

Once in the town, Kitty pulled up, for she did not know just where the lad's home was.

"See this town?" said Springtime, who, thinking of the long time Johnny had tricked him, felt justified in gloating a bit. "See this town, wise guy? Well, it's your home burg, this is, and I'm bringing you back to it, just the way Bender asked me to. Now where's this street you live on?"

"I don't remember," said Johnny. "Find it, Pinkerton. You're so damned smart."

"Sure," said Springtime, "I'll find it. Drive along till we meet a police officer."

Johnny squirmed, but was quiet, and Kitty pulled up when they came to a traffic officer, and within a minute they passed a white house in the yard of which was a black iron Newfoundland with a white tip on his tail. Kitty halted a few doors beyond, set the brakes and looked at Springtime.

"I think maybe I'd better go ahead and break it gently," she said. "These old people can't take big news, even good news very calmly. You come along in about two minutes."

Springtime nodded, and Kitty, getting out without a look at the sulky lad, walked in through the front gate. The blinds were closed on the front of the house, and a faint path led to the rear—a path which Kitty followed, and which, if she had been able to read it, would have told her the story of a mother's heartbreak. In it were worn over heel prints of dozens of wanderers, for the word had gone forth that any man who could spring a gag about having been lured away from home by tramps as a lad was sure to get a big feed in that white house with the iron dog in the yard. Kitty tapped on the back door, and while waiting read the names scribbled on the door frame: "Frisco Mike," "New Orleans Fatty," "Cigarette." She heard a soft step within, and the door swung open and the woman

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she knew must be Johnny's mother stood there—gray, bent, spectacled, with a sad, welcoming smile which altered a bit at sight of Kitty.

"Is this Mrs. Martin?" asked Kitty, trying to speak brightly and to keep the tears from welling up in her eyes. "My name is Katherine Osborne, and I've come to see you about something of importance."

The smile faded, and Johnny's mother clutched at the doorknob to keep herself from falling.

"Come in," she said in a low voice, and Kitty walked in and stood in the middle of the floor.

"It's something quite nice," she said. "Something you'll be glad to hear—oh, so glad to hear! It's about a person you've been wanting to see for a long, long time."

The old hands gripped tight under the white apron and then came out in a gesture of appeal. With a low cry Kitty stepped to her and took the frail figure in her strong arms, where she held it tight, rocking it and crooning, "It's all right! It's your boy Johnny come home again. He'll be in here in a minute or two and he won't want to see you with tears on your face. He'll want to see you smiling."

"Oh, if you only knew! If you only knew how I'd waited and prayed! Day after day and night after night—wondering where he was when it rained or when it was cold!" She broke into helpless sobbing, and Kitty, seeing Springtime peering into a window, put out her hand to keep him back. She held close until the sobbing had ceased, then drew away, and taking out her kerchief wiped the tears from the face of Johnny's mother first and then from her own.

"Now you sit right here," she said, helping her charge into a chair. "And be cheerful because you know Johnny is a queer boy, and I have an idea that the best way to make him want to stay home is not to appear to want him. That is, very much. If you make a fuss over him he'll be out of the door the next time he gets a chance."

Kitty went to the door and beckoned Springtime to come in. He was holding the lad by the coat collar and by one arm,

so that he could neither pull out of the grip or slip out of the coat. Johnny was still sulky, but was looking with interest at two boys who stood on the other side of the fence with their mouths wide open. Springtime led him in, and shutting the door, put his back against it.

Johnny's mother gripped her hands tight and stayed in her chair, although her lips were trembling. Johnny looked up at the ceiling and down at the familiar old carpet, sniffed the delicate scent of lemon cookies and then spoke.

"Hello, ma," he said, and took a step across the room toward her. There was a struggle going on in him—the same struggle that goes on when any wild thing is domesticated: the balance was very fine, and one false move on the part of his mother would have tipped it the wrong way.

She spoke in a calm, silvery voice: "Hello, son."

Johnny looked at her, puzzled, for he was all set for a distasteful scene. He drew a step closer.

"Well, I've been gone a long time."

"Yes, son. You've seen a heap of the world, I expect."

"Sure I have, ma. Gosh, I've seen some great places—Frisco, and Chi, and York. Gee, you ought to see the tall buildings in York, ma. They'd knock your eye right smack out! And the levees at New Orleans. They're great!"

"I suppose they are."

Johnny stopped and looked hard at his mother.

"Well, you don't seem very glad to see me," he said with a suspicion of sulk in his voice.

"I am glad, Johnny; gladder than I can tell you. But I suppose this little town doesn't seem like much after you've been in those big places."

"Well, I dunno," said the lad doubtfully as he drew another step closer—so close that he was within arm's reach of his mother. "At first I thought I'd die if I ever had to come back; but seeing the old swimming place, and the trees where I used to get butternuts, and the old deaf and blind asylum on the hill, and those two

Peaveys rubbering over the fence just the way they used to—it seems kind of good to be back here after all."

" You'll find a lemon cookie in the jar there."

Johnny looked at his mother, puzzled, and stepped up and put his hand on her shoulder. She met his eye steadily, although her hands were twisting the apron hem.

" Say, ma," he said, " aren't you going to give us a kiss?"

Then she took him in her arms, and Springtime and Kitty looked out the window, for there was something so sacred in the look on that old face that it seemed a profanation just to watch it.

After a time Johnny drew back and made for the kitchen door, for outside there was the stir of a constantly collecting crowd of his congeners. Springtime blocked his way and looked down at him grimly. The lad swapped hard looks with him for a minute and then his face relaxed.

" Aw, hell," he said, " I kick in."

" For good?"

" Ain't I telling you? Get out of the way, you big lump!"

In spite of the bluster Springtime knew that one wild thing had been tamed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ACCOMPLISHMENT.

THE end was undramatic. All along Springtime had felt that when he finished his job in the galvanized iron shed, there ought to be a shower of meteors or a concert by massed bands. Nothing like that happened; the last bean fell into the open mouth of the sack without either exploding or making sweet music. Kitty felt the possibilities of the situation, for as the last one traveled along the belt, she decreased the speed until it moved millimeter by millimeter. As it trembled on the brink the movement was as slow as the minute hand of a clock, and when it fell she said with a long breath, " There!" And after they had looked at each other for a long minute, " You did it!"

It was over; all that remained was to

settle with Osborne and he would be free to go. And even as he looked into that friendly face that had helped him through the dreariest job of his life, Springtime felt that things had not changed since the time when he had first discovered his love for Kitty. He was as far as ever from being able to take care of her, and as he trundled the rest of his share to Pasquale's store the cold northwest wind was as full of invitation to him as ever before.

Leaving Kitty would be a wrench, but staying would be a denial to his strongest instinct. The thought of what Kitty might think of him if, after he had settled down, he failed as a man of business, filled him with panic. When he had come back and counted out Kitty's wages, he sat for a long time in the tin shed pondering, and the net result of that pondering was that there were only three things left for him to do: settle with Osborne, say farewell to Kitty, and pick up Durkin at the mission.

At the bank Osborne could see him, and did; Springtime walked into the inclosure and slumped into the deep chair.

" I'm through!" he said.

" Through with what?"

" Beans! You and I can settle up now. You said that when I had twenty bushels done I could go, provided I didn't want to stay and finish the other twenty."

Osborne looked at him without his usual crisp snapping of the eyes. He fumbled at a button on his coat and cleared his throat and finally said vaguely: " Settle up?"

Springtime nodded, and still the old man did not seem to comprehend; he put on his glasses and took them off, put them on again, and finally let them dangle from one finger tip while with his free hand he moved the papers on his desk.

" I suppose you want a settlement," he said.

" Man, if you knew how I had waited for this time to come, you would not ask me such a question. You'd know it!"

" I suppose you have been under a strain," said Osborne gravely, " a bigger one than any of us realize. You're fifteen pounds lighter than you were. So you've finished—all through. What do you think you want to do?"

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"Dritt!" said Springtime. "God knows what you have up your sleeve now, but I'm warning you that unless I do get free, I'm going to fight—in some way or another. You've had the drop on me and you've put me through the worst three weeks I've ever been through."

"Haven't you learned anything from it?" asked Osborne, and there was a glimmer of his old self in the sharpness of the question.

"Nothing—except to hate work."

"Aren't you glad that you stuck it out—didn't give up—made a machine to take the drudgery out of the job? Put a real piece of work through by being patient?"

"Go on!" said Springtime bitterly. "How could I help being patient when you had the drop on me? It was a case of sorting beans or breaking rock, and I'm darned if I don't think I had rather break rock. What's the sense in patting me on the back for doing a job I had to do?"

"You didn't have to. You could have sat there in the shed and smoked brown paper cigarettes until you had made a smoked ham out of yourself. There wasn't any way I could force you to pick over beans, and the fact was that I didn't want to force you—I rather hoped you would choose to do it once you got started. I hoped you might learn to tackle a dull job and stick through until it was done, for the reason that there's a great deal of just that sort of drudgery in any kind of real man's work. Lots of times a man swears, when he gets through building a house or training a horse or anything that takes time, he'll never tackle such a thing again, but if he has made a success of it he *does* take another job and so on through life. If he's any good he takes on another, even if he has failed. You're a rambler, and I didn't know but what—once you'd got around a dull piece of work—it might mean that you would stay here and go into something permanent—factory or office or farm management. I think I could rake up something."

Springtime tipped his head back like a dog howling at the moon and bayed: "No!"

"All right, all right—I was only trying to be decent. Things around here need new blood—these things I'm in, and I don't know what will become of 'em when I'm

gone. Have to sew 'em up in a ~~time~~ ^{time} ~~way~~ ^{way} of some sort to keep the women ~~folks~~ ^{folks} investing in California Air Prefered. Things need new blood." He cleared his throat heartily and jumped back into his old manner. "And I may add," he concluded, rearing back in his chair, "that that same cast-iron nerve, that unadulterated pluperfect nerve which has carried you through life so far, would probably be quite an asset even in as slow a town as this."

He took out his handkerchief and trumpeted, shot back his cuffs, and all the bristling aggressiveness of him came to the surface.

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," he said, "and the Chinese have a proverb which says that rotten wood cannot be carved—in plain United States that means that a decent citizen cannot be made out of a bum. Have you sold all your share of those beans?"

"Yes."

"What did you get for them?"

"Three dollars a bushel."

Osborne pushed his chair back and looked at his prisoner, guest, and employee.

"Now, who the devil gave you three dollars a bushel for beans when the top price has been two ninety-five for the past month?"

"Pasquale," said Springtime, trying to keep the triumph out of his face, "the provision merchant."

"What did you do, blackjack him?"

"No. I just told him that they had been sorted by a special process called remilling, and he reckoned that was worth an extra five cents a bushel. He has a lot of them in his window now with a card stuck in them that says: 'Early Osbornes. Remilled. The better bean.'"

Osborne made a note on a pad—a furtive movement, which did not, however, escape Springtime.

"No use," he said gently. "I've sold him all he will take. Your share will have to go to the elevator."

"Beat me to it, huh? Son, that's what I mean when I say that things need new blood. I've been raising beans for years—all kinds, hand-picked, hand-sorted, but the remilled bean, the better bean, never! Oh,

my gosh! Remilled! You know when I started there were crooks in the provision line, but the wooden nutmeg was about the top of their speed. The best in those days was plain best, but now there are a hundred fancy ways of getting the extra cent out of people. Good apples went by the barrel, but now good apples have to be wrapped and packed individually and shined up. I have a plot of land out west of town here that I've been cutting up and selling off, and those lots have been moving about as fast as molasses in January. But across the road a smart Aleck puts up a pair of brick pillars and calls his place Runnymede Manor and sells lots as though they were hot cakes. Where'd you get this idea of remilled?"

"It was Kitty's idea mostly."

"Thank God for that," said Osborne devoutly. "I could never look myself in the face again if I had let a footloose bum like you beat me out. And you still think you had rather be riding brake rods than living here with a good job, pay day every Saturday, and no cops to look out for?"

"I'd rather be the deadest bum," said Springtime solemnly, "than the liveliest millionaire that ever lived!"

That statement seemed to take all the crispness out of Osborne again; he became aimless and vague, and after he had figured back and forth for five minutes he shut the book and tore up the promissory note.

"Hell!" he said. "Let's forget it. If you'd been going to stay here I would have stuck you for every cent you owe me, but since you're going back to the jungles you'll need every cent. You know there might be a market for a small hand power bean sorter like that one you rigged up."

"You can have my share of it," said Springtime, rising.

"That's a contract," returned Osborne quickly, but seemed on his part loth to rise. He fumbled with the papers on his desk and finally said in a hesitating way: "You don't think you'd like to stay and do that other twenty bushels?"

Springtime looked down at him with a pitying smile.

"I've heard poor jokes in my time," he said, "but none as bad as that."

That brought Osborne out of his chair as though he were a bouncing ball; he flung open the bronze gateway and said: "Beat it!"

The wanderer looked into the banker's half-shut eyes for a half minute, swapping him glare for glare; he looked so hard that as he backed out of the gate he bumped into some one, and whirling, saw that he was facing Mrs. Osborne. Back of her was Kitty, flushed from the nip of the cold northwest wind, wearing fallen-leaf brown, with a small terra cotta hat pulled down over her brow and ears.

At sight of them something had occurred to Osborne, for he reached out, and seizing Springtime by the arm, dragged him back into the inclosure, then spoke a few words to his wife and to Kitty—words which came to the wanderer, muffled and distant. Osborne swung open a glazed door marked "Directors' Room," and when he had ushered his wife and Kitty within, pushed the unresisting Springtime after them.

Mrs. Osborne instinctively chose the chairman's place and came to rest there as a full rigged ship comes to anchor. Kitty took a place close to a window with her back to the light where she could look at Springtime, who stood near the middle of the long table. When they were all within, Osborne shut the door and advanced to the head of the table and pointed a short finger at Springtime.

"Do you know what that damned fool has just done?" he said. "Do you? After getting around the dismallest job that man ever undertook and showed that, after all, he had some sense, he turned down a proposition that any man in the village between the ages of nine and ninety would have jumped at! I offered to put him to work at anything he wanted, and he knows what that means. Turned it down—after getting five cents more a bushel for beans than any man in the history of the world ever did get. And now he says he is going back to the railroads to get himself beaten up by fly cops! Can you beat it?"

Springtime's eyes, which had wandered to Osborne when the banker began to speak, turned toward Kitty, but he could make nothing of her face, for the reason that she

stood in the shadow. Never had her half of him loved her more, but never had his wild half so thirsted for freedom, and the third part of him, the common sense part of him, told him that in the end she would be happier without him than with him, for he—a blown-in-the-glass stiff—could never keep her in fallen leaf-tweeds.

"The wild goose!" said Kitty softly, with her eyes fixed on Springtime.

She was thinking of the time she had first seen him, and the change that work and good living had brought in him. He was thinner and paler, and his eyes, while still humorous, had lost their hard look. Springtime carried himself differently, just as Durkin carried himself differently. Still there was something touching in that change, as there always is in any change from wildness to uniformity, and Kitty, feeling it, said: "The wild goose!" again, very softly.

Mrs. Osborne looked at Springtime and her nearsighted eyes were blurred with tenderness; it was exactly the same sort of look she took on when she was feeding Archie.

"Why not?" she said. "Why should he stay? For some there is one kind of living and for others another kind of living. Every man must work out his own destiny—and he has shown that there are many chances for doing good among the sort of men he will meet. We shall miss him, but we shall give him God-speed."

"Well, it beats me," said Osborne, and pounded the table with his fist. "Why do you suppose a man wants to stand up when he can sit down—why sleep on the ground when he can sleep in a bed—want to ride the bumpers when he can ride the cushions? It must be a kind of insanity. Now, see here, Springtime, there's plenty of excitement in the kind of life I lead. Tell me straight—didn't you get some out of that bean job after all—I mean the idea of floating a loan to get money for your engine, and then selling them a little above the market? Didn't you get any fun out of that?"

"No," said Springtime in a low voice, "not one damned little bit!" *

Osborne threw up his hands.

"You're past me, young fellah! I've seen many in my time, but never one like

you. Hang it, you look like a gentleman and talk like one a whole lot more than I do, and you have gray matter. But still you're foot-loose!"

"I've never denied it," said Springtime wearily.

It was all getting to be too much for him; he was crazy to be gone. Kitty moved over and slipped her arm through her father's.

"He'd stay if he could," she said. "You don't understand, but I do. He has to go, and it would be worse than silly for him to stay as long as he has to go. Suppose he did stay, he would always be thinking about roaming. Let him go and get it out of his system, as they say, and then if ever he should want to come back—"

She looked at Springtime, who had been following her lips as though he were deaf. It was hard, but it was easier to have her feel that way.

Kitty, in a directors' room, was like a rose in a foundry, but there was a connection, for it was through that directors' room that she managed to wear fallen-leaf browns. He nodded to her, unable to speak, and knew that no matter how long or how far he roamed, still the thought of Kitty would always be a sweet pain. He took a step forward and at that movement Osborne, in a rage, balled his fist.

"You know I still have something on you! I could keep you in this town until you rot—if I wanted to. And, darn me, if I don't think I want to; sometimes when a man won't do the thing that's good for him, it's a kindness to make him do it. I have enough on you on account of that hold-up to hold you here, and sure I'd like to!"

Mrs. Osborne turned in her chair and caught her husband's eye. She adjusted her glasses so that she could get a clear look at him and let him have the full benefit of a near-sighted glare.

"Don't be absurd!"

Baffled, Osborne looked at Kitty, who shook her head and said: "It's no use, old-timer."

The old man surrendered, and Springtime saw that it was time to go. He roused himself from a near coma into which he had fallen and put out his hand to Osborne

"You've been square to me," he said, "in some ways. Not all. I'm thanking you for not being any harder than you were."

Osborne shook his head and flourished his hands, but did not speak or offer to return the grip. Springtime turned to his wife, who gave him a double hand clasp.

"Good-by, dear boy," she said. "After all, everything is usually for the best, isn't it? If only we have faith and trust to the good, things come out right in the end. If ever you come to our home again you will find—"

"Slim McCabe!" bellowed Osborne. "Get out!"

Springtime turned to Kitty, but no words would come. He fumbled in his pocket and brought out the envelope into which he had counted her wages and held it out to her.

"Your pay," he said, "Kitty—"

With her eyes on his she took the envelope, slipped it in a pocket, then put both of her arms about his neck and kissed him square on the lips, then let him go without a word. Springtime backed out of the door step by step and swung it shut on the tableau of starry-eyed Kitty with her hands pressed to her lips, while her father and mother, stunned, sagged on either side of her.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRAITOR.

HE found Durkin in the general meeting hall of the mission. Some of the glass doors had been swung shut, so that the convert sat within a comparatively small chamber, in the center of which a round stove burned almost red-hot. With his feet on the fender and his head tipped back, Durkin could have posed for a picture of bachelor comfort if only he had been allowed a cigar, cigarette, or pipe.

Springtime drew out a cigarette as he slumped into a chair near his pal, but Durkin put up a warning finger and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder. He heard a faint, feminine bustle on the other side of the partition and saw a skirted shadow looming and fading behind Durkin. He

put the cigarette back and looked his friend over, and that look told him that Durkin would have to make a few changes before they really began to travel. He was wearing a still different suit, and a pair of patent leather shoes with cloth tops—in them his long, aristocratic feet looked very well, but they would never do for straddling bumpers.

"Gee, Durk," said Springtime, "where did you get the swell pair of kicks?"

"Kicks?" said Durkin, wrinkling his brows. "That's criminal slang for shoes, I've heard. If that is what you mean, they are a rather good pair."

Springtime laughed soundlessly and jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the general direction of California.

"I'm drifting," he said in a low voice. "How about it?"

By some mysterious process all the stiffness and respectability melted out of Durkin, and as he leaned forward in his chair with a glance over his shoulder, his steel-gray eyes were as bright as pin points.

"When?" he asked cautiously.

"Pronto. As soon as I can get down to the yards and hook a rambler. Then I don't stop till I get to the coast. Durk," he said tensely as he gripped the other's knee, "you've heard it said that I was a real traveler, haven't you? Well, I've never done any moving compared to what I'm going to do. You and me are holding down every fast train between here and Frisco, in spite of hell and Jeff Carr. Are you with me?"

Durkin's thin nostrils expanded.

"So you're drifting," he said dreamily; "you're on the wing. Good old Springtime! Mulligans and hangouts and bulls chasing you through railroad yards and saps and all the rest of it. Good gosh!"

"That's the boy, Durk," said Springtime, still holding him by the knee. "You're too good for this sort of thing. You can chuck those swell togs in the first town we come to and get a good piece of change for them, too. You and I don't belong in this sort of life—we're travelers, tramps royal, and will be all our lives! We can be on our way in half an hour."

Durkin bent his head and for five minutes neither said a word, and in that silence

Springtime heard the faint continuous rustling on the other side of the glassed partition. A woman's voice began a song—a soft soprano voice humming a gospel tune, and at that sound Durkin slowly settled back in his chair, straightened his color, pulled his cuffs down around his wrists, and was once again Durkin, gentleman, and prize convert of the Star of Life Mission. He shook his head and his eyes begged for mercy.

"I can't," he said in a whisper; "I can't. The fact is that I'm going to be married."

"Married!" cried Springtime as he sprang to his feet. "Durk, you snitcher!"

"Ssh!" said Durkin, for the song had stopped. "Don't shout so jolly loud, old chap."

He caught Springtime by the wrist and forced him down into his seat, where the wanderer sat, betrayed, crestfallen, for until that bad moment he had not realized how much Durkin had been figuring in his plans for the future. Whenever his wild self had begun to scheme for the good days to come, Durkin had always been there and all those good times were to be doubled by the presence of the tall man. Without him, life looked gray and uninteresting.

Durkin shook down the stove and poured some more coal into it, all the time casting glances at Springtime which showed that he felt his own shame keenly. He arranged the dampers to the sixteenth of an inch and said: "She's a good soul."

"She has coin!" said Springtime bitterly, and while Durkin winced a bit, he showed no signs of anger.

"That's what started me," he said, "but that's not what finished me. It wouldn't make any difference now; I'd go ahead with it, anyway. And winter's coming, Springtime; winter's coming, and even in California winter is winter. Take a tip from a wise guy and settle down."

"What are you going to do when you get fed up?" demanded Springtime, as he indicated the gloomy corners of the mission. "You can't stand this very long. A man can't swear off roaming all of a sudden any more than he can swear off dope all of a sudden. Durk, you've got to taper!"

For a half second Durkin looked panicky,

and Springtime knew he had too long upon a hidden fear.

"We're going to travel, Springtime. We're leaving as soon as the jolly old knot is tied, and when I come back I trust that things will be different. Travel's very broadening. And I don't want you to get the idea, old boy, that I'm doing this for the money that's in it. Because I'm not. At first, yes, but now, no. She has much in addition. Springtime, there isn't an ounce of meanness in that woman's nature—at least, not more than an ounce. And what's more, I haven't any other wives over the country, not even a widow."

He finished in a confiding whisper, and Springtime felt his anger evaporating under the smooth man's words. But Durkin had no more than finished than that panicky look came back in his face and he looked over his shoulder. All their talk had been in whispers, but he sank his voice still lower and said: "All the same a man might get fed up even with perfection. You'll promise to drop me a line every two or three weeks and let me know where you are? And then I'll get a leave of absence to go on a business trip and we'll roam for a month—say, next spring. I have it, Springtime, I have it—a scheme that will settle it for both of us. You get something soft here for the winter, a job picking beans or something like that, and then in the spring we'll start out for a ramble of a month or two. I could probably get you a job through this outfit. How's that?"

Springtime shook his head firmly.

"No, I've got to beat it now. I've got to!"

From behind the glass partition came a gentle call: "Thomas."

Durkin looked at Springtime with a queer, baffled expression in his eyes, and rising, slipped through a door.

Springtime did not wait for him to return; he got up and went into the street, which seemed empty, cold, and forlorn. If Durkin had been at his side, or Kitty, that street would have been glorious, but he needed one or the other. The northwest wind had freshened and poured down the street in a cold, damp stream. He pulled his coat over his throat and headed for

the railway yards—it was a shame about Durk, for somehow or other he had come to stand for that wild half of him that loved all things in tramp life, its humor, its irresponsibility, its hardships, its queer, intangible rewards. His defection was a staggering blow, and instead of looking forward to his long jump across two-thirds of a continent with pleasure, Springtime looked forward to it as something of a job that was bound to be uncomfortable. If a true pal ever lived, it was Durkin, and he felt deep in his heart that he who had wandered all these years without a true companion, had found one, only to lose him to a mission and a widow.

Springtime cut through a clump of warehouses and crawled through a hole in a fence and into the railway yard. He knew that there was a yardmaster's office in the middle of that fan of tracks and that there was a chalked bulletin on the outside of it showing the schedule of trains. Locating the little gray-green structure, he walked toward it, and so long had he been out of hobo life that when a bellow sounded from the far end of the yard—a bellow that said: "Git, you son of a toad!" he did not connect it in any way with himself.

It was only when he saw a brakeman grinning from the top of a moving string of box cars that the old instinct awoke, and looking behind him, he saw the great Slim McCabe tearing down between the tracks with his sap dangling from one wrist.

Springtime's response was automatic—he sprinted for the first open space he saw—a break in the six-foot board fence, through which ran a pair of tracks. He saw that in addition to his other talents, McCabe was a sprinter; he was no mean runner himself, but he could tell by the sound of feet in the cinders that the constable was gaining on him. He flashed through that opening and found himself in a perfect *cul-de-sac*, a long strip of side track for storing coal cars with a six-foot board fence on each side of it and two strands of barbed wire on top of the six-foot fence.

He could neither dodge nor stop, so he gathered all his forces and went straight for the fence. Leaping, he caught the top and his feet hammered against the sides until

they stuck on a resinous knot and he sailed clean over the top, and as he hung poised there for a fraction of a second he saw that not only had McCabe stopped running, but that he was laughing and slapping one huge hand against his thigh. He had just time in which to wonder what he was laughing at; then found out, for he came down in a ditch filled with water—six feet of cold, crusted water.

He broke through that crust of fairy ice as if it had been thin glass and went down and down, over his head until his feet struck mud and stuck there. Half wading, half swimming, he floundered to the shore, and as he pulled himself out into the biting wind, he still heard the shouts of merriment coming from the other side of the fence.

Springtime pulled himself out and shook himself without saying a word, for he had no words that would possibly fit the occasion. He kicked about a peck of black mud from each foot and began to run and did not stop until he was back at the Star of Life Mission. Durkin received him without amazement; when he saw his condition he went to a cupboard and brought back coat and trousers, neatly pressed and arranged on hangers, shirt, underclothes, even shoes.

"I have three suits," he said casually. "You can change here where it's warm. She's gone."

While Springtime warmed himself into a glow with the towel and dressed, Durkin spread his wet clothes over the backs of mission chairs and placed them near the stove to dry. His sympathy was perfect, for he said not a word while Springtime was changing; and when he had clothed himself anew he threw open the door of the stove and offered his guest a cigarette. Then when Springtime had lighted up, he began to feel it possible to talk about what had happened to him.

"A bull chased me over a fence," he complained. "All I was doing was walking across the freight yards, and some guy yelled: 'Hit the grit, you son of a toad!' and I looked around and here was McCabe with a sap after me. If it had been anybody else I would have faced it out, but not with him! I'll bet he had a pair of bracelets in his pocket and a blackjack on his

hip. I simply hit the grit and ran like I never did run before. I came to a six-foot fence and I went over it like a bird, but on the other side was a ditch full of water. Durk, it's an outrage! You'd think this country was Germany the way these cops carry on! Something ought to be done about it!"

There was a faint light of amusement in Durkin's eyes, but he controlled his merriment until he saw a corresponding laugh in Springtime's eye, and then the two joined in laughter that became almost a yell when they thought of the second part of Springtime's joke, the first being that he had been soosed in water, and the next being that any hobo should think about legal redress. Durkin lighted a twist of paper in the fire and they smoked, like boys at boarding school, hunched up and blowing the telltale smoke up the chimney, where the draft sucked it up and it disappeared without trace.

"Springtime," said Durkin, "do you know what it is that keeps chaps like you and me chained to the road? It's because there's always something to laugh at. I haven't had a good laugh since I've been in this town until you came in just now. Thanks for that one. I remember one time when I was ditched away off in the desert and I slogged it to a little place where there was a water tank and nothing else. I got there in the middle of the day and it was so hot that you could have fried eggs on the rails. I went over to the tank to rest in what shade there was and there was a bindle stiff fast asleep. Gee, he was a crumb! I never did see such a wreck—fourteen toes sticking out of each shoe, and he'd been sleeping in the same hat for years. But he was dreaming sweet dreams and he would smile and smile and all of a sudden he said: 'Sixty days!' and sat up.

"I asked him what it was all about, and when he finally got it through his head that he had been dreaming and this water tank was real life, he told me that in his dream he was a judge. 'I dreamed I was a beak,' he said, 'and a swell was fetched up before me for breaking the speed laws. And I says to him: "What's your name?" and he says, "Percy Rockerbilt." "Where do you

live?" I asked him, and he says, "Oh, Paris, New York, Palm Beach, anywhere." "What do you do for a living?" I asks him, and he says, madder'n hell: "Nothing! I'm a gentleman!" "Well," says I, "since you don't live no place and don't have no job, it is the opinion of the court that you're a common vag. *Sixty days!*'''

Springtime and Durkin doubled up with laughter—silent laughter, as though it were bootleg stuff and there was a revenue officer just outside the door. There was a wistful look in Durkin's eyes and a wistful feel in Springtime's heart. Durkin put his hand on his pal's knee and nodded mysteriously, as though reminding him of an appointment he was likely to forget.

"In the spring, bo," he said, "in the spring!" From that their talk turned to other things than roaming, for it was a tender subject, and too sacred for that dark mission. One doesn't speak of a dear, dead friend in a boiler factory.

When Springtime's clothing had dried, Durkin, the universal genius, hunted up a flat iron and did a good job of pressing them on the table where, in hard times that might in some future centuries to come fall upon Napoleon, the soup line would be served. When that was done he pulled out a gold watch, and slipping it back in his pocket, said: "It's almost five—have you any place to spend the night?"

Springtime said vaguely: "I don't know."

"I'll be back about eight, and if you aren't better suited, old fellow, by that time, I can fix you up a flop here that won't be so bad. Do you need any money for chow?"

Springtime shook his head, for in his pocket was Pasquale's good money. Durkin put on a good overcoat and a derby hat and walked to the door, where he turned and said again: "In the spring, bo, in the spring!"

After he had gone Springtime sat for a time until the dark smell about him—a smell made up of the scent of old hymn books, old carpets, old soup, old walnut chairs—drove him to the street. Once there he began to wander aimlessly, feeling like the small boy who has sworn to run away from home and finds himself at dark without the courage to go ahead or come back.

Kitty's half had gained enormously since the cold bath, and it drew his aimless feet down the alley which he had traversed a short month ago for the first time. He found himself standing just where he had stood when he first saw her behind the syringas, where the smell of the mince pies on the window sill had stopped him dead as the scent of woodcock would stop a bird dog. Peering down the alley he saw that the stable door was closed, and walking to it also saw that it was locked.

He had had a curious idea of going back into that tin shed and starting on the second twenty bushels, for it might be that Kitty or Tom Osborne would come in there at five or a little after and on that familiar ground he could get over the shame of the meeting. But that door was locked tight and he turned back—cold, miserable, homeless—and stared into the strip of murky splendor in the west. The lawn was full of chill, misty light, and the northwest wind sang in the sere shrubbery and the weathercock on the roof pointed unswervingly toward Seattle or Portland, or some of the other places where he ought to be.

Then, far above him, he heard a faint, confused cry—a cry like the sound of a pack of hounds heard over a dozen ridges of hills. Springtime listened with his head back, trying to locate it, trying to understand what it was—then a resounding honk from Archie told him that it was the cry of wild geese on their way south—the indescribable, romantic clamor of his brothers of the air. As he peered into the northwest he could just make out the pattern of them—a long, slant line with its tip bent back like a broken lance. Springtime vaulted the fence and raced across the lawn, for in some ways Mrs. Osborne's whole life had been shaped just for this moment—the moment when Archie should be free to wing his way up to his brothers in the sky.

The messenger bolted up the steps, opened the door, and shouted in:

"The wild geese! They're coming over now!"

He caught a glimpse of Mrs. Osborne's startled face behind a tea urn and saw two visitors turn their heads at the interruption. Mrs. Osborne clutched at her glasses and

heaved herself to her feet, saying: "Oh, my good Heavens!" She dashed out onto the porch and from there ran across the lawn, peering upward and trying to see the pattern of wild geese. Archie had his neck thrust out of the bars of his coop and was doing curiously limber things with it as he looked up into the sky.

His long beak opened and closed and the yard was full of his brazen clamor, but the clear cries which he sent heavenward were somewhat blurred by the Indian meal, the evening ration of which had just been set before his coop. He would look up and call, and then sink his head up to the eyes in the warm mess, then look up again and the coop trembled at his struggles.

The lady of the house had put ineffectual hands on the structure that housed him, and was tugging at it. Already the pattern of geese was directly overhead, so that when Archie looked up, there was a backward bend in his neck. Their melancholy chorus came straight down.

"Free him!" cried Mrs. Osborne, and kicked at the coop. "Set him free!"

Springtime kicked it over with one blow and Archie was free. He stood peering upward for a second, honked, stretched himself up on his toes and spread his great wings. Slowly he moved them, soft whistling things that swept up small feathers and set them whirling. His mistress stood by him, raising her hands and letting them fall as though she would waft him upward, murmuring inarticulate words of encouragement.

There was no doubt that the broken wing was healed, and more and more rapidly Archie fanned the air until he rose a yard off the ground and hung there for a moment. Then he came down as gently as thistledown, and although his loud, clear voice proclaimed him king of geese, he trundled across to his platter and sank his beak into it up to the eyes. The flock was drifting south rapidly, and as their clamor became more and more distant, Archie seemed loth to let them go—once again he got a foot or two off the ground, but seemed unable to hold his gains.

Always he came back to the platter of cornmeal, and Springtime, who began to see

that there were implications in the situation which would be humorous, drifted off to the shelter of a syringa bush, where, if he could not control his laughter, it would not offend that philanthropic soul who still stood, with her arms following Archie's movements, still uttering sounds of encouragement, but beginning to look blank as the wild geese dropped down toward the south and Archie remained on the lawn.

At last the bird gave it up; he made his decision in favor of civilization, and squatting down before his plate, gave himself over to wholehearted enjoyment of it. Mrs. Osborne looked blank, until, hearing some one laugh, she turned and walked rapidly toward the house.

Springtime had whirled at the sound of that delicious chuckle and found that Kitty had appeared from somewhere—Kitty, who, with her eyes alight and her hand over her mouth, was trying to keep down unseemly merriment. When Mrs. Osborne had gone

Springtime dropped the dog into Arctic,
and the two laughed until they were weak—
so weak that Kitty had to be within the
curve of his arm for support.

After a time their merriment subsided, Kitty's into a wise, little smile; Springtime's into a wide-eyed stare at the warm orange lights that had come on within the house. The rays from the windows shot out into the gloomy, windy yard, where they seemed to coagulate and settle into a warm nimbus about Springtime and Kitty. Springtime bent and touched her lips with his; but as he raised his head, his wilder half rallied for one last stand.

"In the spring, bo," he said softly, "in the spring!"

Kitty looked up and the wise little smile broadened a bit.

"Yes, dear," she said.

And to mix metaphors: "Yes, dear," uttered in just that tone, has been the swan song of many a wild goose.

THE END



WOMEN VERSUS NATURE

WHEN Nature started on the job she didn't grab the outside knob

And slam the door and hurry home before her work was done;
She merely did the best she could, and when she found the job was good,
She dressed the animals and birds and loosed them one by one.

In gorgeous hues she clothed the males—the birds with fancy wings and tails—

She made them handsome to the eye in color and physique.
The male must stand the greater test, and so Dame Nature thought it best
(No doubt that probably was it) to make the female weak.

The lion and the kangaroo, the peacock and the cockatoo,

She clothed in raiment rich and fine—the females drab and plain;
She spottet up the leopard male, she striped the tiger, plumed the quail,
And handed all the female kind the honor and the pain.

The human female only sees Dame Nature as a piece of cheese—

She's switched the system all about and thinks no more of Then;
The Now is hers—she's grabbed the clothes, and so with powder on her nose
She turns it up some nine degrees whene'er she talks of men.

Oh, Nature, how we need thee now! The farmerettes have grabbed the plow;

They've swiped our jobs and trades and arts—they've taken every chance.
Oh, Nature, in your hour of ease—or any other time you please—
Come! Hurry on the job again while we're yet wearing pants!

Miles Overholt.



French Louey's Delay

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

FRENCH LOUEY grew restless with the approach of frosty nights. He jingled his rawhide bag of gold from wolf bounties and hides, listening absently to the tune it rang. His throat half formed the moose call as he pawed the ground with his moccasins, a longing for the wild in his blood.

"By Gar!" he grunted. "Time for me to ru-run for de green timber!"

Keen frost lays the gloss on guard hair of mink and otter; it starts the fur of marten, fox pekan, and all the land animals to coming prime. The hardwoods let their gay colored leaves flutter to earth, while the spruce and balsam glaze with bright reflections from the evergreen of their needle leaves.

"Time for me to smoke meat, jerk venison!" the old trapper grinned, the scattering bristles on his leathery cheeks standing out like silver wires. "Firstest I know, zat sou'west wind lay me by gull rocks maybe till I freeze up! No chance it—Come, now, you lazy scoundrel! Come—hi!! Hi-i!"

French Louey complained in bitter words, but with twinkling eyes, of the fate that

dragged him each autumn from Talking Birches, a buxom breed at St. Ignac, and from another friend, Mrs. Wustane, both of whom he had courted in vain, but amusingly from age to age.

Then he dropped in on Captain Argyle, of the fish tug Little St. Ignac; ran in to see the Dampier boys, lying at Black River mouth. He danced ashore on limber, springy legs, and he was pitched about and tossed in his wonderful old sailboat, between squalls as he scurried in and out, down the coast of the North Superior shore, paying his respects.

"By Gar!" he grumbled. "I don' lak de looks, not a beet, of dat blue cloud down by the sou'west! Ba-a—hi-i!"

On some days, with a sweep and a swish, the blue-cloud would make a grab, but he would duck around a point, or under the lee of something or other, cackling at the squall that he just felt in the hair on the back of his neck. The blow gone by, he would go slipping out laughing and jeering the vanity of squalls, and from the horizon the dark swells of the "windy mists" would reach up and draw back—for he knew them; knew their nature; read their will to

engulf him, as he knew the North Shore, East End, and the Green Timber.

Thus he arrived at Blue Jay Harbor. He sailed in with his red canvas spread to the western zephyrs and a slant of a golden, setting sun casting his long pointed shadow in purple ahead of him. He sang the mad joy in his heart, holding his tiller with one hand, shaking his jingle-gold at the stone along the water's edge and toward the tall, slim spruces, firs, and graceful silver birches.

"I come-e!" he cried. "French Louey come-e! Hi-il! Sons o' groons! Wolfs look out—an' dis tam, ol' boy, I bet I jerk yo' into sevum hunder pound of venison! I bet-t! Dis tam I do eet!"

Wolves he detested, hated, and delighted in. Toward moose he had a different feeling, which he regarded with amusement and exultation. The moment he heard the keel scrape on the gritting sand of the landing, he pranced ashore with a kind of spidery jump, making fast with a line, but stopping in a blank amazement as six or eight gorgeous bluejays, puffed out in their winter plumage, swarmed into overhanging branches, and began to scold.

They screamed, jeered, chirruped, whistled, and spread the alarm of his arrival until the chickerees back in the evergreens began to call, and two or three ruffed grouse took up the alarm, nervously, and flew away with the subdued roar of their kind.

"Dar yo' go!" French Louey cried in anguish. "Tam plue jays, scare all de game, all de meat anywhere, an' now where I shoot my jerk, eh? What I live on dis wintaire if I don't jerk de moose?"

He turned a gaze of malignant joy and delighted indignation at the flock of birds. He walked along the sand, peering and stretching his neck. Sure enough, a few rods distant he came upon a track on the loose grit. Some great brute had trampled there, taking long steps, and plowing heavily amid the scattering fall of autumnal leaves.

"Dat's heem, all right!" French Louey shook his head. "The son of a goon! He mak' sevum hunder pound of jerk! I keel heem, an' look, I get fat on my ribs like a — h, like a bull moose, mebby! Mebby,

too, I grow me a pair of yellow beens ~~beens~~
beeg, by Gar, I have a stiff neck! Here
he is yet! An' you blue scoundrels! W'at
de t'un'er yo' tell heem I come for? Hi-il!
By Gar! I feex yo' sons o' goons!"

He went rushing back to his boat. He scrambled aboard. He dashed into the cabin. He snatched up a .22 cal'ber repeater, emerged with it gesticulating, and began to flash the muzzle up and down. He made so many strange motions that the flock of blue jays lowered their voices and withdrew a yard into the fringe of the bristling green timber.

"Now look 't!" French Louey sighed. "W'en I pull down on 'em, dey ain' no more in sight! By Gar! I feex 'em!"

He laid the little rifle to one side, and began to prance ashore and about. He was a most absurd figure. He threw himself, spread himself, preened and posed, perked up and strutted about—he seized now an ax; tossed next a bundle; manhandled his supplies; fairly danced to tunes that he whispered or whistled under his breath.

He paused to receive upon his finger a bumpy, tubby, soft-eyed chickadee as an old friend, and *presto*, out of the ruins rose a beautiful tiny log cabin; out of the raw wilderness appeared a trapper's camp; and back under the wilderness canopy was a flash of bright yellow as large as the man's small hand, the fresh blaze that marked the line French Louey followed into the green timber, with three or four steel traps to the mile, each one laid for marten, or fisher, mink or lynx, otter or whatever was at the crossings.

In four days the old man had landed his outfit; in a week he was all snug, his boat hauled out, and safe on its pole ways. He scurried into the wilderness, clearing his line of its impeding windfalls, dropping traps at the cubby sites, keeping keen watch for sign and tale of the wilderness, reading the news of his quarry and his poultry.

For one thing, Old Hang-Nose was around yet. Toward that bull moose the trapper bore a particular, personal, instinctive resentment. French Louey knew the old boy's hoofprints, whether in beach sand, in caribou moss, or under the spruces in

the deeps of dark purple, dead-fallen evergreen needles.

" You wait, yo' ol' scoundrel!" He shook his dark finger at the heavy gloom beneath the tree tops. " Come de time yet w'en I feex yo', a 30-30 in de lungs, maybe, or worse yet, in the throat or haid! Yah! Put a good bullet in you an' den w'at, ol' Hang-Nose? Will you roar at me—eh—sh-h-h!"

As if answering his challenge he heard the call of a moose. It did not seem so loud. It was not even exactly a heavy sound. Yet it made the woods quiver, stirring the timber, and it seemed as though the masses of the cliffs and rubbed-down granite mountains trembled to that grand and rumbling wilderness music.

French Louey rolled his eyes, blinked and sucked in his breath; he stood by one of his white birch bark wigwams, cone-shaped, and a beautiful salmon color with patches of pure white, which he had just built anew on an ancient camp site. He saw on a topmost twig over his head a buck blue jay, a fine fellow, in whose feathers shone the light of day. The instant the man's black eyes discovered the bird, the jay dived from its perch and darted from view among the evergreen thickets.

" Yeh! Yeh! Go tell dat ol' feller I'm here!" the trapper shrieked after the bird, shaking his fist. " Some day I lose my temper, you tellin' heem my business so mooch! Yeh! I feex you—den heem! Sevum hunder poun' of jerk—dat's w'at I get! Sh-h! French Louey, yo' keep yo' mout' shut—con' say nottin'! To-morrow —to-morrow!"

That night the big moose roared his challenge and uttered his love call. French Louey listened to the sound. He knew that voice. He had heard it during other autumns. He knew that as yet the old bull was lonely, and that there had been no answer to soothe the wild longings, to assuage the terrible loneliness that made for misery, while attaining to the heights of love-lorn ecstasy. The trapper, too, had sung songs; had uttered challenges; had memories of successes long ago before there had come the slow but sure passing of his own day.

" Shut up!" he whispered from his bal-

sam boughs, as he was wrapped in woven rabbit-skin blanket. " Shut up! When I hear you I think of me. You wait—to-morrow! I feex you to-morrow!"

He meant it. Before dawn he was cooking a pair of grouse over a green birch fire. He had his cup of tea. He warmed his carbine over the fire and drew on his gloves, as at false dawn he issued into the frosty glow of stars about to fade.

He had in mind the killing of a great moose, to jerk the meat, to convert the skin into snowshoes and thongs, and perhaps to sell the horns and head for a hundred dollars at Port Arthur for the next fall rush of hunters seeking trophies.

He left his trap line blazed through the wilderness, swung south into a burning, and skirted the tangle of briars to follow along a bog of moss with half-drowned trees, looking at the tracks there which told how truly he had found his way to the scene of the lonely bull's stamping ground. French Louey held his forefinger in his mouth for a minute, and when the tip was well wet and warmed, he held it in the air over his head. It grew cool toward the west first.

" Hi-i!" the hunter grimaced. " W'e're dat ol' boy go? Le's see!"

He found where browse had been nibbled, moss had been torn away in wads, brush broken by huge horns wrestling with it, ground pawed by big hoofs. He read the signs and tracks, found the heavy footsteps which showed the direction of the moose when he took his departure, and saw on the trees where massive horns had bumped the bark, rubbing it; with his rifle grasped in both hands, thumb on hammer, stepping with still moccasins, the hunter gave chase.

" I catch de ol' scoundrel asleep!" he whispered exultingly to himself. " Den, by Gar, in two secon's he wake up—an' I don' care—hi-i!"

Sunrise was now at hand. The golden lights tipped the bare knobs of stony mountains, and made the tops of the evergreens gleam with silver and emerald. Waves of relief from the black night frost came in warmth across the landscape. A chickadee uttered a tentative chirp, a wren made re-

ply, and a chickadee whispered low, with nerves on edge. Then squarely over French Louey's head there was a shake of a branch. A voice broke with rasping shrillness on the quiet.

"Wan-n-n-nh!"

French Louey froze in his tracks. Cold chills ran down his back. His mouth opened, his eyes bulged, his ears worked, and his boney hands closed down on his stock and barrel.

"*Sacré!*" he gasped. "Dat tamm plue scoundrel! Blue jay—I feex—"

He threw his rifle up. As he did so the blue jay flitted a rod into the mass of evergreens and began to scream, call, whisper, and jeer. The cry of alarm was taken up far and wide by red squirrels and other jays, and a flock of chickadees, in the jovial innocence of their companionable hearts, came to join the excitement: one of them came plumping down onto the brim of French Louey's hat and tipped over to look upside down into his eyes.

The man heard a faint crash; he heard a rattle of horns on standing timber; he heard a branch break; he heard, not a hundred yards distant, the moose racing through the close-growing trunks.

"Der he goes!" French Louey gasped. "In two minutes I catch heem, by Gar! Old Hang-Nose gone—I t'ank you, Mee-staire Plue Jay! Oh, yeh! I t'ank you!"

He turned to storm homeward to his trap line camp, and, arriving there, he sat morosely for hours by the stick-fed fire in his wigwam. When at last he bobbed out to fell some white birch and block them off for winter firewood, he muttered and cursed under his breath while he slammed the splitting blade in deep, or sent the cutting edge into the soft, white wood. He glowered at the visiting chickadees, and threw chips at the impudent red squirrels. He sighed with angry appreciation at the blue jays and whisky jacks which came bobbing and pirouetting around.

"Dat ol' Hang-Nose!" the trapper gasped. "Nex' tam, by Gar!"

He had his trap line to lay down for his business of life. He scurried through the woods, dropping a trap at each old cubby, or stopping to build a new one where in-

sert or memory ~~had not come his way~~ of a fisher, mink, or martin. He returned to the range of old Hang Nose, his coon traps all taken up and distributed, the old lines cut out, and his new loops run and blazed. Light of pack, grim of visage, savage of intentions, he went ransacking the valley of boiling springs for the big moose.

"I need dat meat!" he said, reckless of the rabbits, grouse, and fish which he had hung up. "Nothing lak bull moose to mak' a man strong!"

He found and followed the big fellow's tracks. They led through open burning, across springy swamps of caribou moss, through ridge gaps and into windfall where the down timber was laid in heaps—top on top. French Louey paused at the thicket, which covered acres. He sat down to scratch his chin; he whispered to himself; then he heard a crackle of dead sticks, a crash of breasted timber; he sprang to his feet, sprang to a sloping spruce trunk, and ran agilely to see the better.

He saw a great, black figure, with bright yellow antlers of enormous spread, with tawny legs plowing through the tumble-down tops. With a cackling shriek he threw up his carbine, but even that slight weight cost him his balance. He tipped, tilted, wavered with both hands, and a foot sprawling in the air against the sky line. Then he fell ignominiously into the bent limbs of an underlying balsam twelve or fifteen feet beneath.

"*Sacré! Sacré!*" he squealed. "*Parbleau—hi-i!* By Gar!"

Barked shins, insulted dignity, and side-long embarrassment settled upon French Louey in equal proportions. Old Hang-Nose was a devil; he was a wizard; he was malignant, like a carcajou; and he was in league with the laughing jays. No use trying to bother with such a scalawag as that! The trapper slunk away back to his own line and quietly shot a yearling bull, dressed out the meat, slit it into foot-long ropes and salted them in layers on the inside of the short-haired skin.

After two days, in which the meat took up the salt, he washed the alkali from the strips, piece by piece. He swung the meat on long, slender sticks, which in turn he

laid on a stout frame work. Under the sticks he spread a depth of six inches of white birch and maple green body wood. The heat cooked the meat. As the fat dripped, and the coals ashed over, French Louey laid on strips of green wood as large as his finger, which burned without smoke. After four hours the meat stopped dripping. It was cooked.

"Dar!" the trapper grimaced. "I got my jerk! I ask no odds of dat ol' son of a gun! Hang-Nose don't starve me to death—not this winter! I fool heem, daway."

The trapper strode over the big hoof-prints with high disdain—ignoring them. When he heard the old boy romping through the timber, hitting the trees with his huge horns, the trapper sniffed indifferently. When he saw a strange cow moose come into the range, a strong brute with a bell of her own, the old trapper put his hand up beside his face to look away again.

"So dat's eet, eh? To-night I'll listen, eh?"

That night he listened, but only for a while. He stared into the fire of the bark wigwam, full of thoughts of his own. He heard the old bull's call; he heard the cow's answer—the first and only one to reply to old Hang-Nose that fall, as the trapper felt sure. For weeks the old fellow had been raising his voice to the sky, had lowered his mouth to the ground—and now his call was answered; now his longings were reciprocated.

"So!" French Louey said. "By Gar-hi-i!"

POLITELY he rolled up in his blanket, pulled the rabbit fur about his ears, and went to sleep. A week later he saw the two a quarter of a mile away across a lake whose shores were fringed with ice. He was in a cluster of balsam where he was swinging a lynx snare. For minutes he watched the two magnificent brutes as they grazed along side by side.

"Too tam bad!" he grumbled. "Now I have all dat young bull jerk—I am not to waste heem—huh! Mebby by and by!"

Snow fell. The evergreens were burdened. The opens were spread with the soft blanket: the briars, ferns, and light weeds flattened to the ground. The tracks of all

wild life led hither and yon upon the white page. The great moose and his maid laid their tracks with those of the others.

Pekan ran bounding, otter leaped and slid, lynx walked with dignity, and foxes paced about, step by step. Nervous snow-shoe rabbits bounded and jerked back and forth, and on their multitude great snowy owls, the weasel tribes, the foxes and big cats fed, as on the up-starting, noisily flying grouse as well.

French Louey caught them with his bullets, shooting five, whose misfortune he jeered while he cursed the weights of their beautiful black and heavy hides. He caught mink, and marten, sneering at their fierce, unintelligent ways; he called otter particularly silly and insignificant, though they were the hardest of all to catch, except wolves. Toward the tracks of wolves he crossed he carried himself with vociferous mockery of respect—and shot two while they were sleeping on the sunny side of tiny balsams where they had pawed beds through the snow to green, deep moss.

"Wolves! Wolves!" he chuckled, shaking his bag of gold at the limp, dangling gray hides. "Dar-r! Fool wolves!"

The snow was only a few inches deep, but he carried snowshoes wherever he went. Any day the dark leaden clouds might fluff down in deep waste of heavy snowfall. He made the most of the frisking life that spread its record in the trackings whose footprints he read with such instinctive understanding.

A wraith of the green timber, he flitted hither and yon, tending to his terribly efficient steel traps; choking lynx who did not know what was strangling them; picking up tracks of furs that he knew—here a certain black-tailed fox—there an otter with a snaky slide, and always when he came to it, turning to follow it for a few rods, however tired he might be, along the trail of old Hang-Nose or of the big cow who now ranged his range.

French Louey wondered about that bull moose. He would drop on his hands and knees, making sure that the old fellow was eating a caribou moss and not taking goatberry leaves. He would reach with a long stick to examine the twigs of slender birches

where the moose had stood on his hind legs to chank the sweet, tasty, young bark.

Now that the urge of need no longer drove the trapper's trigger finger to the carbine guard, French Louey noted that he saw the big moose.

"Every tam I look aroun', by Gar, w'en I don' need to see 'm!" the trapper whispered under his breath when he saw the black giant stalking along in the gloom of heavy timber, or out in the thin footing over open moss.

Sometimes the two looked each other in the darkling eye, each uncertain of the other's intentions—yet the moose decided to mind his own business, turning to vanish without haste in whatever cover was convenient. The cow, more shy, more reticent, kept clear, and seldom loomed in the foreground.

Snow followed snow. What had been convenient tracking, showing whither the pekans ran, where the mink crossed from stream to stream, was now a deep, fluffy mass against which the broad chest of the bull moose plowed, and in which French Louey lifted high his long raquettes, complaining bitterly that he was too old for such nonsense; pausing, however, to bandy words with a flock of blue jays, or talk soothingly to some still-living victim in his pretty cubby, ere it had jerked the well-sweep clear to lift it by a caught paw to swing hopeless and helpless—a bit of living fur in its doom.

Until New Years, French Louey was all enwrapped in the best of the year's trapping. After the sleety thaw of January he took the leavings of the fag end of the season. Working harder, he caught less; bitter cold, meaner snows to combat, desperate storms to weather—he grew weary with his sustained endurance; he saw his quarry growing gaunt as food grew scarce.

When he met the old moose Hang-Nose he saw in the shaggy coat a certain leanness, and in the lowering eyes a certain heaviness of experience. The huge antlers had disappeared, having fallen from the bull's brow, leaving odd scars. Without them old Hang-Nose was even a more imposing brute, with his enormous head, his short neck, his high shoulders, and his slop-

ing back and coarse little tail. The cow remained near, too. When French Louey happened by the pair he saw the female drawing away, while the old bull interposed himself in a casual way on his retreat.

"Hi-i!" the trapper whispered. "So they go—together!"

Late in February sleet and freeze gripped the wilderness in crush and misery. For four days French Louey was held in one camp, because the snow would not even support him on his raquettes. The freeze covered the snow with a crust which, when it broke, showed edges as sharp and points as cutting as soft glass.

On his snowshoes he could skip about, skating whither he would. He found his traps catching the wandering meat-eaters. He snared lynx. He looked eagerly, hoping for bears to come out from their dens. He listened at night for the wandering wolves whose hunting cry was worst in the time of crusted snow. He carried his rifle, plenty of ammunition, and wasted no hours of light of the lengthening days. Dread of the bitter cold, of the fanged wilderness affected even the taunting and buoyant spirits of the old trapper.

He was glad to come back to Blue Jay harbor now. The background of the grim old lake, with its floating fields of ice, its splash of blue gray waters, and its impassible barrier, was less menacing than the covert of the green timber where the dead cold oppressed even the habituated toughness of French Louey himself.

He was unafeard. He merely wondered at the voices he heard; he merely shrank when he saw a moving shape out of the corner of his eye; he merely shuddered when in the sparkling, starlit night he heard the voice of an owl, and the far-yelping cry of the hunting packs.

Old Hang-Nose and the cow had retreated from some miles inland to the heavy balsam fir and spruce knoll flats just within the lake's walls of red stone. When French Louey came down to his log cabin, in from the snow-covered hulk of his little sailboat as it lay drawn out on the beach, he found that the two moose were yarded at his very door.

"Dat ol' scoundrel!" he gasped. "De

impudence of heem! W'en I don't want heem, hyar he is! W'en I want heem, w'are is he?"

The two had tramped up and down through the swamp thicket making deep, narrow paths in the snow. They had walked astride tall, slender birch saplings, and, having borne down the tops, had eaten the long switch branches. They had not waxed fat, but they had lived well, compared to some of the gaunt yarded beasts he had seen in other parts of his trapping land.

There, within a few acres, French Louey and the two moose occupied a common shelter of forest canopy. The two brutes did not welcome him. Far from it! They plowed away with snorts and heavy blowings; but the trapper knew their tracks, and did not need to see the moose to recognize them.

He sat that night by his little stove, with its chunks of good body-wood, warming his hands while the white frost lining of the cabin slowly blackened as the heat melted the tiny crystals, leaving instead drips of water which dried, and the wonder of a warm room in the terrific cold was enjoyed by the old bones of the man. He had at last so hot a fire that his red stove drove him to the near wall, and when he tried his breath, for the first time in weeks he could not see it.

"Hi-i!" he chirred, like a red squirrel.
"Hi-i!"

When he turned in on his bunk, which he had covered a foot deep with shingled balsam boughs, he enjoyed the luxury of an open blanket, with full warmth. Three times, at intervals of a bit more than an hour, he filled his stove. When he awakened the next time it was with a start and a bound that brought him suddenly to an erect position.

He listened, cocking his head. He shivered as he drew on his heavy shirt before sticking an ear through an open doorway. When he heard clearly, he reached to pick up his carbine.

"By Gar!" he gasped. "Wolves! Wolves running wolves hungry!"

Starved, gaunt wraiths of the arctic cold, driven by famine need of their shrunken

flanks, wolves had ceased sneaking and slinking through the green timber, and they were packed together now while racing in the open, the voices of their hunger whining as they howled in the star-lit night.

"Der!" he whispered. "Behin' de black streak ridge—through the gap, now Garry—dey're comin'! Now down to boiling-water creek—up—up! Shu-u!"

He knew the ledges from which the voices echoed; he knew the deeps of the valley gorges where the pack's course was muffled; he stiffened as he heard the full-throated yelling when on a height the pack gave wide voice to open range.

"Dey go by!" French Louey assured himself. "Dey go on down, maybe, to Pukaso, to Pilot Harbor, probly to Dog River! Dey go off der!"

That was his wish, his hope. But suddenly he heard them utter an outburst of lust of blood in eager discovery.

"W'at? W'at?" the trapper gasped.
"W'at dat?"

For a minute he could not guess the answer. The pack had found a trail, full of promise, which made them thirst the noisier with famine hope. At first he tried to believe he was mistaken; then he thought it was his own trail—but he knew his trail was somewhere north of east of the starved chorus.

"By Gar!" he muttered. "Old Hang-Nose—hees femme, eh? Parbleau!"

French Louey stepped into the open, all clear, listening the harder. He heard the fearsome thing of that dread wilderness. He heard the wolf pack, a numerous and hungry one, coming squealing and yapping along the track of some victim. French Louey rose on his tiptoes as he saw in his imagination the thing that was soon to take place.

Old Hang-Nose was coming, plowing through the snow, the sharp crust cutting him. The belled cow was coming, too, heavy and slow in that deep tanglefoot. Driven by such hunger the wolves could not easily be held off by even the quick blows of the long, slender legs of the big bull. The cow, his mate, was in dire need. The trapper blinked, staring at the snow beyond the shadows of his cabin in the

He was used to tragic aspects of the wilderness. He was himself—though he did not say so—one of the most tragic of all.

"*Secré!*" he grumbled, shrugging his shoulders. "Dat's too bad!"

He could do nothing. He stood listening while he heard the wolves in thirsty pursuit. They came nearer. Their voices grew louder. He heard them sight their prey in the starlight. He heard their wild cries of lust and eagerness. Then he heard the snarling as the pack closed in. He heard them tumble back, yelping and dismayed. He heard them whining and mustering their courage again—heard them race on, and then heard another baying: heard another closing in, as hunger drove arrant cowardice to assault in which some must endure hurts and breaks.

French Louey was jumping up and down. He was uttering short cries and making gesticulations. He was beside himself with Gallic excitement as he heard that terrific but losing fight for life coming nearer. The woods were in an uproar. The dark timber quaking with thunder from the heavy freeze that split frozen trunks, echoed to the squeals and mouthings of the pack.

Then the man could hear the crash of breaking snow crust; he heard frozen branches as heavy brutes surged through the dead tops of fallen timber; he heard the heavy breathing, the explosive gasps as the two moose struggled against the swarming pack of agile, grabbing, blood-thirsted wolves.

The moose came plunging nearer. The old bull whipped back the increasing pack for a minute, and suddenly, right fairly at hand, the cow broke cover. Then the bull staggered out, broadside, striking at the shadowy things swarming around.

"Hi-i! Hi-i!" French Louey screamed and cackled, and jumping high, reckless of consequences, he dashed the few yards along the hard path to his smoking little spring, to plunge into the *mélée*.

He threw up his carbine, shooting as he glanced along the side of the short barrel. He saw with satisfaction the red flash of powder: he heard a loud snarl turn into a howl of frantic grief and agony. He threw

seven bullets into the field, keeping twelve. He thrust more into the magazine, and empty it again into the gray devils, as they would have conquered.

For half a minute the wolves would believe what was happening. They tasted warm blood in their mouths; but the most frantic could not withstand gunfire, or the shrieking, triumphant, battle-loving human prancing at them.

The pack vanished in the timber—those that could go. Silence fell upon the wilderness with a kind of crash. The howls, yelps, the very whines disappeared. French Louey himself grew still. He heard gasps and sighs on the ice of Blue Jay Bay. He saw the two black figures, one of which stood on wind-swept ice beside the other, as she lay sprawled where she had slipped.

"Huh!" French Louey blinked at the two. "Well, by Gar-r-r-r!"

He returned to his cabin, softly closing the door. He stirred the fire, put on some chunks of wood, and shivered with cold that succeeded the perspiration of his rapid violence.

In the morning, just after dawn, he slipped craftily out. He saw old Hang-Nose and the big cow, with crimson icicles down their breasts and legs, walking stiffly up into the swamp cover again.

The bull turned a pair of small, darkly suspicious eyes in the direction of French Louey, who stopped short, water pail in hand. The two stared malignantly, steadfastly, full of mutual defiance, snorting softly and even with challenge; then the moose walked with deliberation as suited the gait of his weary but safe mate with her burden. When they were in the woods the trapper filled his pail, set it in the snow, and then viewed the grisly wretches of the night hunt as they sprawled in the stained snow.

"One—two—five—six!" he counted, on his fingers, and raising his blackened hands fistwise at the victims of his natural aiming, he swore. "I teach you something, trying to rob me of my jerk next fall! I teach you, you bet! Damn gray scoundrels! Hi-i! Now I shook my wolf-gold at you, an' put some more een dat ol' raw-hide, eh? Hi-i! By Gar!"



B

The End Justifies the Means

By C. S. CALLAHAN

IT would be in the nature of a miracle if either Kinkel or Kunkel were to "go up" in his lines; but if such a surprising thing should happen there isn't the slightest doubt that any vaudeville audience in the country would be able to prompt them.

The act is as much an institution as the Constitution or the Fourth of July. Moreover, the Constitution has been amended nineteen times; while not even the oldest inhabitant can remember any addition to, or subtraction from, the Kinkel and Kunkel turn.

They made their début in the days when vaudeville was variety and not considered a respectable form of entertainment. Its exponents toiled mostly in beer halls and dime museums. The partners were fond of referring to the good old times when they

gave ten performances a day for thirty dollar a week joint, and had to share their dressing room with Achoo, the trained seal; Kuao, the missing link, and the two-headed boy.

But that's all past and gone. Now they headline at the Empress, and their salary runs into four figures.

Kinkel is a little fat man, who adds to his *embonpoint* on the stage with the aid of a large stomach pad. Kunkel is tall and thin, and increases his height by wearing high heels and a built-up wig.

Their acting clothes are checks of astonishing pattern, and their hats the flattest of derbies. They both sport chin whiskers, and employ a splintered German dialect in their dialogue. There is always a round of applause when the partners come trotting out. Then Kinkel says to Kunkel:

THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS

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"Who was dot lady I seen you wit' yesterday?"

And Kunkel replies:

"Dot wassn't no lady. Dots my wife."

Then Kinkel reaches up, and sticks his thumb in Kunkel's eye. Kunkel retaliates by kicking Kinkel in the stomach. Kinkel arises, and smites Kunkel over the head with his cane. Kunkel kisses Kinkel lovingly on the forehead, and then kicks him in the stomach again.

Is it any wonder the audience shrieks with laughter at the greatest knockabout act on the stage?

Who can yodel as Kinkel does, or who else executes a wooden shoe dance with the grace and aplomb that is Kunkel's?

Long may they flourish and continue to delight the refined and intelligent.

Now the Scylla and Charybdis of the show business are extravagance and the ladies. The Thespian mariner who steers his bark safely between these two perils, can reasonably hope to keep out of the Actors' Home in his old age.

On the first count the partners were unanimously acquitted by all their acquaintances. As Eddie Maloney, the monologue man, said: "Either one of them birds makes Harry Lauder look like a Coal-oil Johnnie." Indeed he went further, and asserted that if Kinkel and Kunkel were to be placed a thousand miles apart, and either one were to spend an unnecessary dollar, the one who did not squander the aforementioned wealth would immediately experience a violent attack of heart failure.

There isn't the slightest doubt that they were a pair of hard-boiled eggs.

Darts from feminine eyes glanced from the couple as harmlessly as peas rattling on a hippo. They had never paid any alimony or breach of promise; and they never under any circumstances bought refreshments or gewgaws for female acquaintances.

But there is no armor so impervious that Cupid cannot find a loose joint for one of his arrows. Also it is a well-known fact that Achilles ramped around for many years before his mushy heel was discovered.

The electric sign in front of the Oriental Theater in Toronto bore the names of Kinkel and Kunkel—and Dotty Tremaine.

It was the opening matinée of the week, and the comedians were in their dressing room, busily engaged in donning their professional war-paint.

"Who's the Jane that's toppin' the table with us?" said Kunkel. "I never heard of her."

"I dunno," responded Kinkel. "She's from the other side. First week over here. Bill MacNutt says she's there. Guess I'll go up an' give her the once-over. She closes the first half, an' we ain't on till after the intermission."

Kunkel lit his pipe and engaged in a game of solitaire while his partner was inspecting the new arrival. When Kinkel returned he was obviously excited.

"Say, that Tremaine's a panic," he said. "She just knocked 'em out of their seats, an' they've been sittin' on their hands all afternoon till she went on. She done three encores an' took six bows, an' even then they wouldn't let her go. Had to throw on the house lights an' start the orchestra to kill 'em off. I ain't seen anybody in years that can put over a song better. An' she sure is a sweet patootie in tights—looks somethin' like Russell did years ago. She'll be a riot in New York."

Kunkel was rather surprised at Kinkel's enthusiasm, as that gentleman usually confined his remarks on other performers to what is professionally known as hammer throwing. However, he refrained from any comment.

That evening Kunkel viewed Miss Tremaine's act. The lady was indubitably a genuine "trouper." She knew how to "put over" a song in the way that comes only with years of experience and real ability. Also she wore gorgeous costumes, and looked dazzlingly beautiful in the glare of the spotlight. But make-up has been known to cover a multitude of wrinkles.

"She knows her business, but she ain't as young as she was some time ago," soliloquized Kunkel.

After the Tuesday matinée, Kinkel surprised his partner by the celerity he displayed in getting out of his stage clothes and into his street habiliment.

"What's the excitement?" he inquired. "Puttin' on a disappearin' demon act?"

"Can't a guy be in a hurry without you openin' your yawp?" demanded Kinkel fretfully. Then he seized his hat and exited, giving the door a violent slam.

Kinkel whistled thoughtfully as he removed the grease paint. What ailed Kinkel? Why the irritation at this perfectly natural question?

He was still debating his partner's unusual conduct as he walked to the hotel. The street was crowded with bundle-laden shoppers, floppers, newsboys, and the usual flotsam and jetsam of a big city. Suddenly he stiffened like a pointer sighting a covey of quail. Right ahead of him was Kinkel, and he was with a lady. The lady was Dotty Tremaine. The plot jellies.

Kinkel trailed behind the couple, and every few seconds he wiped the perspiration from his brow. A man recovers from the smallpox or a broken leg; but falling for a skirt has put many an empire on the bum. His worst fears were realized when he saw his quarry enter an eating place. It was the best restaurant in town too.

Kinkel was clearly hooked. Never before had he been known to purchase food for anybody but himself; and never for himself in a first-class establishment.

That evening Kinkel reached the theater early, and at once made his way to Bill MacNutt's dressing-room.

Mr. MacNutt was a sturdy man who had appeared before the public for a number of years. His conversation during performances was confined to "hup" and "ready." He was the "understander" of "The Bounding MacNutt's," a troupe of acrobats well and favorably known in both hemispheres. Probably the fact that he was unable to talk while on the stage rendered him exceedingly voluble when off.

"Say, MacNutt," began Kinkel. "You knew this Dotty Tremaine over in England, didn't you?"

"Sure I did," said Bill. "I worked with her at the Empire in London, an' all over the Moss an' Stoll time. That gal's some performer. Don't see why she didn't come over here years ago. She's gonna mop up in New York."

"Kind of a vamp, ain't she?" asked Kinkel with affected carelessness.

"No-o-o," replied Bill judicially. "I wouldn't say she's a vamp. She's more what I call a anaconda. She's had four husbands that I know of. Probly there was more. Always had bad luck with 'em. One committed suicide, another was a animal tamer, an' wound up inside a lion. The last one was Henry Teeters. Course she may have got another one since, that bein' four years ago. You might have knowed this Teeters. He was over here 'bout ten years ago—played the Orpheum time. Big tall fellow, with a mustache an' goatee. People used to turn around an' rubber at him, he looked so much like the devil. He was one of the best jugglers in the business. Billed himself as Bozo, the Demon Prestidigitator. Remember him?"

"Don't think I do," said Kinkel. "Where is he now?"

"That's hard to say. Near the tail end of the war he went over to France with one of them entertainment units. He was walkin' down the street one day, an' the Dutch dropped a 'Jack Johnson' alongside of him. When the smoke cleared away there was no sign of Bozo. So people naturally figured he'd gone away somewhere."

Kinkel returned to his dressing-room and mechanically made ready for the evening performance. After all the years of peace and quiet, Delilah had Samson in the toils. The Serpent was in the Garden.

It's an old truism: the older they are the harder they fall.

Kinkel's infatuation was the talk of the theater. He dined and lunched his fair charmer; he lavished boxes of candy, and flowers galore.

"She'll have him jumpin' through the hoop an' playin' dead," was Bill MacNutt's gloomy prediction. "It's about an even bet he marries her in Buffalo next week."

Kinkel viewed the situation with anguish, but there was nothing he could do. Kinkel had been of age for many years, and presumably had cut all his eye-teeth.

Many a theatrical team has been wrecked by feminine wiles. A dissolution of Kinkel and Kinkel would be a catastrophe akin to a break between *Damon* and *Pythias*, or the Smith brothers.

The following week, the partners, Miss Tremaine, and the MacNutt act were to appear at the Majestic in Buffalo. From there Miss Tremaine was to go to New York for ten weeks of Keith time, while the other two turns journeyed to the State-Lake in Chicago.

In the division of labor connected with their business, it was Kinkel's duty to purchase transportation and attend to the baggage, while Kinkel looked after the orchestra rehearsals.

So on Sunday morning at Toronto Kunkel bought the tickets for Buffalo and checked the trunks. He was seated in the waiting room, talking to Bill MacNutt, when his partner entered with Miss Tremaine.

"Lookit," whispered Bill hoarsely. "He's carryin' her grip."

In the theatrical world, carrying a lady's hand-baggage is as much a badge of servitude as Fido's collar.

"'Ow are you this morning?" said Miss Tremaine sweetly.

"G'mornin'," responded Kunkel stiffly. "S'pose your hotel trunk goes to Maloney's, Kinkel?"

Maloney's was a Buffalo boarding house favored by vaudevillians of economical tastes.

"Naw, it don't," said Kinkel. "Send it to the Statler."

On the trip to Buffalo Kinkel sat in the ladies' car with Miss Tremaine, while Kunkel rode in the smoker with Bill MacNutt.

"To think of him floppin' for a dame after all these years," said Kunkel.

"I never knew a man yet that didn't get landed sooner or later," observed Bill sagely. "You ain't never safe till your hands is folded an' the lid's nailed on."

"Well, I'd give a hundred dollars if somebody would push that she body-snatcher off the bridge when we're crossin' the Niagara river," declared the worried comedian.

Kunkel was nearly made-up for the Monday matinée when Kinkel came in. For many years Kinkel had worn a five-carat diamond tie-pin. It was a beautiful stone, and worth twenty-five hundred dollars. It was Kinkel's most cherished possession. To-day it was not in his tie.

"Hey, Kinkel!" yelled Kunkel. "The ice is gone. You ain't lost it?"

"Naw, I ain't lost it," growled Kunkel. "I'm havin' it set in a ring."

Kunkel said no more, but he sought MacNutt at the earliest opportunity.

"Say, Bill," he said, "Kinkel's havin' his lamp put in a ring. I wonder what for?"

"I ain't wonderin' a-tall, I know," replied Bill. "I was with him this mornin' when he took it to the jewelry store. He's gonna have it set in platinum, an' give it to Tremaine. It won't be ready til after the matinée Saturday. Looks to me like it's gonna be an engagement ring."

"The dern fool is crazy," groaned Kunkel. "What's he want to go an' get mixed up with a old hen that's had half a dozen husbands already? I wisht I knew some way to wake him up before it's too late."

"It sure is gonna make a bum outa your act," said Bill. "If I knewed any way to help you out, I'd do it. That woman's a regular octypuss."

That night MacNutt hailed Kunkel as he was coming off the stage, and mysteriously drew him into a corner.

"I gotta grand idea doped out," he said. "It'll either be a hummer or a bust; but I think it'll go through. If it does, Kinkel'll save the diamond an' lose the Jane. Are you game to chance a hundred on it?"

"What's this glorious idea?" inquired Kunkel.

"I can't tell you," said Bill. "You just gotta take a chance. I ain't gonna make a cent on it."

"All right," said Kunkel recklessly. "Go ahead an' shoot."

The subjugation of Kunkel was complete. As a lover he made *Romeo* look like a piker. His expenditures for food, candy and flowers fairly appalled his partner.

"He's gone clean off his nut," he wailed to Bill. "In thirty years I never seen him let go a dollar before unless he had to."

"Aw, they're all that way when they get mushy," said Bill soothingly. "When he's over this, he'll be tighter than ever."

"Yeh," said Kunkel. "But is he ever goin' to get over it?"

"You wait an' see," replied Bill with an inscrutable air.

When he came into the dressing room on Saturday night, Kinkel produced a velvet box, which he opened with a flourish.

"Ain't it a nifty?" he inquired.

It was indeed a beautiful ring. The stone in its platinum setting resembled a ball of fire.

"Are you really goin' to give that to Tremaine?" said Kunkel.

"Why shouldn't I? It's mine, ain't it?" demanded the *Romeo*. "An' furthermore, I'm goin' to ask her to marry me. She's the sweetest little girl I ever met."

"Girl!" repeated Kunkel scornfully. "She's had six husbands."

"She's had four," said the infatuated one. "She couldn't help it if they all died."

The minute the curtain was down on the performance that night, there was a rush and bustle on the stage. The acts on the bill were scattering to all points of the compass. Some to Pittsburgh, some to Canada, some to Boston. Kinkel and Kunkel and the MacNutt's were to leave at eleven-forty for Chicago. Miss Tremaine was to take the midnight train for New York. So Kinkel would have to work fast with his presentation and love-making.

Pieces of scenery hurtled across the stage, propelled by frenzied stage-hands. Actors ran up and down, grip in hand. Trunks bounded out of dressing-rooms, and crashed on the floor. Dogs barked, and out in the alley the transfer men were loading baggage and hurling abusive language at each other. It was the invariable Saturday night pandemonium.

Kinkel was waiting for Miss Tremaine, and Kunkel hovered around, vainly hoping that some miracle might save his deluded partner. Bill MacNutt's scheme, whatever it was, had evidently evaporated, and that gentleman was not in evidence.

Miss Tremaine, as befits a lady and a headliner, was the last to leave her dressing room. She came tripping across the stage, with a smile dimpling her cheeks. Suddenly the smile vanished; her eyes opened wide; a look of horror spread over her countenance.

As Kinkel advanced to meet her, he was rudely thrust aside by a tall stranger. The

unknown wore a black mustache and goatee. There was a demoniac air about him. All he needed was the red suit to be *Mephistopheles*.

"Well, Dotty," he said. "Ain't you got a kind word for your lovin' husband?"

"Ow-o-o-o," wailed Miss Tremaine. "You cawn't be 'Enry. 'E was blowed up in Frawnce. You don't talk like 'im. Ow-o-o-o-o!"

Then Miss Tremaine gave vent to a piercing shriek, and promptly fainted in the arms of a convenient stage hand.

"Let's beat it," said Kunkel to Kinkel. Kinkel allowed himself to be led away. He seemed to be walking in a trance. All the way to the depot he never uttered a word. He kept close to Kunkel while the baggage was being checked. He sat in the waiting room, watching each arrival apprehensively; and he continually wiped his perspiring forehead, and moistened his lips. It was not until they were seated in the sleeper, and the train was pulling out of Buffalo, that he spoke.

"I'm cured," he said. "No more skirts for me."

"It's a lucky thing for you that her husband turned up when he did," said Kunkel severely. "Half an hour more, an' you'd have lost your rock. Funny thing him showin' up that way; he was supposed to be killed in the war."

"Well, I'm darned glad he wasn't," said Kinkel decidedly.

The train was late into Chicago, and they had to rush to make their opening performance on time. It was not until after the matinée that Kunkel encountered Bill MacNutt.

"I sure did put it over, didn't I?" said Mr. MacNutt.

"You put what over?" inquired Kunkel. "I didn't see you do anything."

"Why you dumb-bell," said Bill, "didn't the guy show up just right to spill the beans? Who do you think brought him there?"

"Do you mean her husband?" said Kunkel.

"On the level, you've played Dutch so long that you really are thick," said Bill. "Why you poor fish, that wasn't her hus-

land. That was a guy named Wally Hughes. He's a legit, been out of work all season. I got him on the long-distance Wednesday night, an' told him I'd give him fifty dollars to come up to Buffalo. The way he's fixed he'd kill his grandmother for fifty bucks. I had to wire him a ticket an' pay his board. He sure was a dead ringer for Bozo when he was made-up. When Tremaine got wise I'll bet she let out a terrible holler. I just spent about a hundred, what with givin' him fifty, an' the fare both ways from New York."

Slowly Kunkel ~~wound a handkerchief around~~
into Bill's outstretched ~~hand~~ with the sighs as each bill left his hand.

Mr. MacNutt pocketed the money.

"I dunno," he said dubiously. "I don't feel just right about it. Resurrectin' a husband that's been planted for four years is kind of a raw trick to pull on a woman."

"Oh, it is, is it?" rejoined Kunkel. "Now let me ask you. Is it half as raw as it is for her to try an' glom a twenty-five hundred dollar stone off a poor old sap like Kunkel?"



BAKER AND BREAD-LINE

HE was a baker's apprentice
And bent his
Back to the mixing and kneading.
Night after night he spent his
Youth for the oven's feeding.
Night after night, night after night
He sweated his soul and seared his sight,
Sweltering, but succeeding.

Journeyman then, then master;
And faster
He served the Molochian altar.
Acolyte, exorcist, pastor,
Teiling the loaves of his psalter.
Pan-load and man-load and tray-load,
Oven-load, counter-load, dray-load.
Never a day did he falter.

Then when the long years had tired him.
They fired him.
Every job has its dead line;
Past it, nobody desired him.
So, in the charity-fed line,
He of the mix'ng and making,
He of the infinite baking,
Stands in the bread line!

Edmund Vance Cooke.



IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

THE PRICE OF A PASS.

THANKS to the fact that Izzy Kaplan not only looks a gift horse in the mouth, but hires a veterinary surgeon to help him, and thanks also to the assiduity of his listening partner, W. O. McGeehan, who separated him from the result of his researches, this magazine is enabled to present to its readers a dramatic warning entitled, "The Price of a Pass."

There never was a time when Izzy would have bought the Woolworth Building for fifty-five dollars from an open-faced stranger in a check suit without asking for a receipt. Nevertheless, his friend succeeded in extracting from Izzy, in a confidential moment, the admission that he, the all-seeing optic of sport, purveyor of the lowest down in dope, and unblushing associate of newspaper men, had once bitten at that infamous confidence game, the free pass, older than the gold brick, and more effective than the slingshot.

Izzy has reserved the motion picture rights to this gripping bit of literature, for he feels that through them he still has a chance to get his eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents back.—THE EDITOR.



ME and Moe Koenigsberg ain't good friends no more on account I chust gave him a smesh in the eye. What did he done to me? Well, I will tell you. That feller ectually went and offered me a free gratis pass to the Polish Grounds to see the Giants playing a baseballing with the Pittsburgh Piefaces.

You are esking me why I should hit a feller a smesh in the eye on account he only offered me a free gratis pass to the Polish Grounds? That shows you ain't had no experience with the free pass business. When you been in the wold as

long as I been and know about that pass thing you would hit your own brother on the chin if he tried to give you a free pass.

Listen good and I will told you how I found out about the free pass business. I got it a friend which he is a sporting editor and he writes for the papers when he gets it a good inspirationing from the sympathetic gin. He told me confidential that he never did like the stuff, but on account of the great nerfous strain which he is

under it all the time he takes a little bit of it so it should clear out.

Well, one day I went to him and I said to him: "Helloi, Jim, do me for a favor. Get me a free pass to the Polish Grounds on account I would like to told my friends in Harlem that I was sitting up in the Pest Box with all the big fellers. Maybe they would think I am so important that I could run for a district leader."

He said: "Izzy, passes is hard to get on account the Giant menegement don't think no more of a pass than they do of their right eye. They want all of the customers to be strictly cesh, but for you, Izzy, I would done it. You are more like a brother than chust a plain sport."

So I told him I was much obliged about it, and he whispered me: "First, Izzy, I know it a place where they got the real stuff. No hooch, Izzy, and no good-natured alcohol. The feller had this stuff in his cellar before the Germans invaded the Bullgines and the war was."

So what could I done? I took him to the choint, and the drinks was eighty-five cents and the glesses wasn't so large, neither. We had about six or seven drinks on account of the sociability, and me and the feller was good friends, and he said my woice was a fine tanner and me and him would be a fine quartet for "Sweet Addlestein," which is a nice song when you are singing it right.



FINALLY I GOT THE SPORTING EDITOR TO COME OUT.

When the feller wouldn't sell us no more of the stuff which he had it before the war was we went out on the street, and my friend the sporting editor said: "Izzy, it is bad for the digestion that a feller should see it a baseballing



game without he had a good lunch. The excitement loosens the epiglottus and unless the system is tightened up by food a feller is likely to catch anything."

That sounded like a good advice, so I took him to Solomon's Café and we had a lot of lunch so we wouldn't get weak or nothing while we was watching the baseballing. In Solomon's there was a lot of chenuine old-fashioned, eight per cent beer which they fix it up by mixing a little ether in the nearly beer. We had eight or ten seidels of this and it was very nice to wash down the food.

Me and Mr. Solomon, which he runs the restaurant, is very good friends, and he wouldn't overcharge me nothing, so the whole check was only twenty-four dollars and a haluf, which inclusioned the beer and the seidel which the sporting editor threw into the looking glass when he was showing me how Mr. Alexander, of Chicago, throws it the curve out.

Finally I got the sporting editor to come out of the place on account it was get-

ting almost time for the baseball to commence starting. He wanted me to practise "Sweet Addlestein" out on the corner on account he said it sounded much better in the open air, where you could get the effect of it much nicer. But there was a politzman standing by, and I don't like to get into no argerments with politzmen on account wunst I lost at one the same time three teeth.

I wanted him to get in the subways, but he stopped me. "No, Izzy," he said. "I never ride to the ball park in the subways on account it would disturb my train of thought. We should take it a texiceb on you on account I am getting you into the Polish Grounds for nothing."

So we got into the ceb at the bridge, and the Polish Grounds is out by One Hundred Fifty-Five Street, and the clock was going around pretty fast, so that I am beginning to wonder about the whole business. When we get to the Pest Gate, where they let it in the free customers, the bill is fourteen dollars and a haluf.

Pretty soon we are in the Pest Box down by the wire, where the baseballlers is starting to prectice. A fresh feller comes up to me and he esks me what paper I am with. I told him I was with them all and not against any of them on account I want to be nice and friendly. Then he says: "You got to beat it."

I looked at the sporting editor feller, but he was asleep and maybe letting his brains have a rest so he would have it a good inspirationing to write it a piece for the paper. I shook him, but he wouldn't wake up, and pretty soon comes it a politzman, who says: "Outside, you." I wouldn't give him no argerment, so I went outside and I looked in my pocket so I could buy it a ticket to see the baseballling, but I never had a dime left. Before I started I had eighty-seven dollars and a haluf.

Then I went up to the feller which is selling tickets to the cesh customers and I esked him how much was it a ticket.

"With the war texes and everything inclusionsed it is one dollar and ten cents," he told me.

Then I started to edd up all the expenses, and I came to the conclusion that a free pass was not a good business. I spend it eighty-seven dollars and a haluf for a free pass and I don't even see the baseballing when I could have got in for a dollar ten cesh money. Ain't that a good proof that cesh is the best way to do business, even you don't get no discount?

So that is why I hit Moe Koenigsberg a smesh in the eye. A feller that thinks I would take it a free pass eny more is giving me a insult, because only a feller who is pretty dumb would take it a free pass to anything. Passes is nix with me from that time on no matter who is giving them out. When you get something for nothing you would find out that it is nothing at all that the feller who gave it to you for nothing would got something when you wasn't thinking.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

JACOB E.—Sure, it is true that I am out of Harward Uniwersity. I was thrown out from there when I was taking photograffts of the footballing. Also I could say that I been thrown out from better uniwersities.

*Next Week Izzy Kaplan will tell
HOW TO SCORE FOOTBALL GAMES.*



The Miracle of the Wilderness

In the heart of a forest—

high up in the purple-topped Adirondacks, where the snows fall early and stay late, a hunter sat down in the great silence to rest. Leaning on his gun, he fell asleep and dreamed . . . *

The forest melted away. In place of the fragrant pines that swept the sky and the giant oaks that closed in about him, quaint cottages dotted the mountain-side. In place of the native fox and deer he hunted, the wilderness was suddenly peopled with many sick—seeking the blessing of health . . . *

The huntsman was Edward Livingston Trudeau—"The Beloved Physician." The *doom* of consumption upon him, he was carried to the Adirondacks to make his last days as comfortable as possible.

This was nearly half a century ago. In those days Consumption—now known as Tuberculosis—was looked upon as a visitation of Providence—was considered unpreventable—incurable.

Then came the Miracle—

of fresh air, of sunshine and rest. Soon Dr. Trudeau was hunting and fishing again. The summer past, he returned to the city. A relapse brought him back to try—as a last hope—a winter in the frozen wilderness. Suicidal mania, friends said. Cold air was regarded as fatal to Consumptives.

Dr. Trudeau thrived on it and lived for forty years in the mountains that taught him how to use for himself and others the greatest weapons against Tuberculosis—*fresh air—rest—sunshine*.

Closely following Koch's great discovery that a germ—the tubercle bacillus—causes Tuberculosis, Dr. Trudeau learned to recognize the little "rods of red." Soon physicians everywhere learned to detect the disease in its early stages and thousands of lives were saved. *For it is in its early stages that Tuberculosis can be cured.*

To bring the sick—

the many tuberculous sick—from the cities to the healing wilderness was the dream of the beloved physician. He realized his dream when he built the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium, the first sanitarium for the open-air treatment of Tuberculosis in America—now a wonderful city of houses built *inside-out*.

One million sufferers from Tuberculosis—

is the estimated number in the United States *right now*. The disease attacks lungs, skin, brain and bone. Beggar and millionaire are exposed. It attacks all ages—from babyhood to old age. Acute danger periods are infancy and early adult life. The greatest death toll is exacted between 35 and 45—the most productive years of life—just when the family is most dependent on breadwinner or homemaker.

No medicine will cure Tuberculosis—

but it can be cured by fresh air—day and night, winter and summer, rain or shine. By rest, good nourishment, freedom from worry, and supervision by trained physicians. Most of all, by sunshine in the home and *sunshine in the heart*. Better than cure is prevention through regular examination by physicians, sanitary living and working conditions, and always fresh air and sunshine.

A great crusade is being waged. Since 1904 the Tuberculosis death rate for the United States has been cut in half. But the fight is not the fight of any one country. It is the fight of all Humanity. And when all Humanity *fights* then shall the Great White Plague that has whitened the world with tombstones for more than two thousand years be driven from the Earth.

Before health work was started, there was a death from tuberculosis every eight minutes of every working day of eight hours among Metropolitan policy holders. The disease still causes one-twelfth of all the deaths in this country. If this proportion is allowed to continue, it means that among the people now living in the United States over 9,500,000 are doomed to die from this preventable disease. Working with National, State and local organizations—the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has reduced the Tuberculosis death rate, for its policy holders, 49% in ten years. As one-seventh of the population of the United States and Canada is insured in the Metropolitan, the lowering of the death rate vitally

affects the entire country. Eight years ago the Company built a sanitarium at Mount McGregor to care for sick members of its staff. In the first seven years there were 896 cases of Tuberculosis discharged. The reports show that 80% of these employees are back at work. For five years the Metropolitan has supported a demonstration of health work in Framingham, Mass., a manufacturing town. The Tuberculosis death rate in that time has been cut in two. The Metropolitan issues a booklet telling how to prevent, how to cure Tuberculosis. A free copy of "A War On Consumption" will be mailed to all who ask for it.

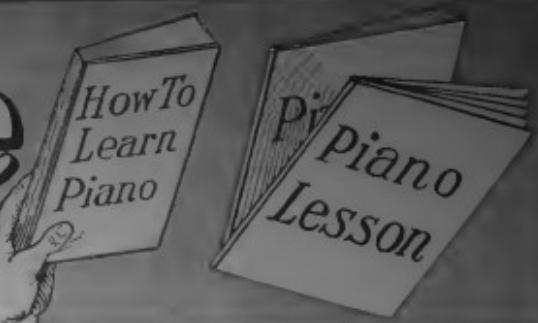
HALEY FISKE, President

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Published by

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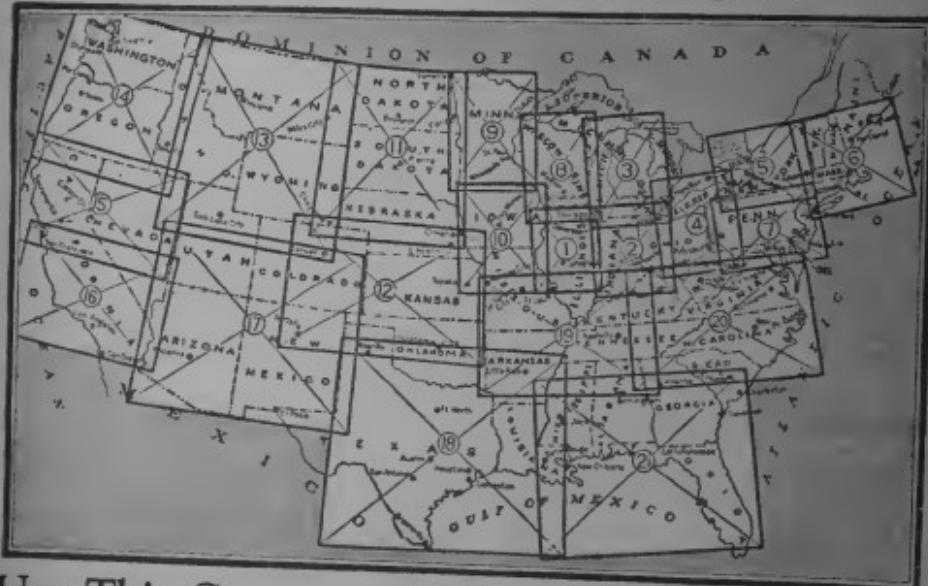
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Thus we mailed several thousand circulars to booksellers, this was enclosing a sample copy of one of the volumes illustrated below. Orders came in by the hundred! The reason, we believe, is that even people can not believe we can really offer to give a value when they are so cheap!

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